RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE AND ITS MEANING:
THE IMPACT OF PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION
ON THE QUESTION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

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INTRODUCTION

The basic contention of this thesis is that religious illocutionary acts function in the same way as do ordinary illocutionary acts. That is, religious utterances are empirically grounded in the real world in some sense, and thereby are cognitively meaningful and true, while closely related to everyday use of ordinary language.

In chapter 1, I make an attempt to explain what I consider to be *the* problem of religious language, as understood by contemporary philosophers of religion. The problem is this: that a religious sentence or an utterance containing the word "God" either explicitly or implicitly, when used as an assertion, though it looks on the surface as if it can be interpreted as an ordinary assertion, yet cannot be thus interpreted or understood. That is, it is argued, if religious utterances were capable of being interpreted as ordinary assertions, they would fulfill the conditions which ordinary assertions fulfill; and since the conditions are necessary conditions for all cognitively meaningful use of language, and since religious utterances do not fulfill these conditions, it follows that religious utterances cannot be said to have cognitive meaning.

In chapter 2, I try to examine various responses to this challenge--the noncognitivist, the cognitivist, those who want to challenge the challenge (like James Kellenberger and George Mavrodes), and the language-

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game theory. The problem with the noncognitivist and language-game theories is that these theories do not give sufficient room for any significant religious truth claim. The cognitivist theory of religious language makes it sufficiently clear that religious utterances are assertions --factual assertions, but this theory fails to show how they are intelligible truth claims. The reason for this failure appears to have been that the proponents of this theory are still working within the framework of a positivist theory of meaning, tacitly accepting this criterion for knowledge. Of those who want to challenge the challenge on the ground that the first challenge is conceptually muddled, I do not have much to say except that muddled or not muddled the challenge reflects a deep and genuine disquiet about the status of religious language. Therefore, it gives us no comfort to be told that we can ignore the challenge.

In chapter 3, I put forward a speech-act theory of religious language. I am convinced that with the use of Austinian conception of "illocutionary act" the demand of this thesis can be met. Thus working out a theory of meaning from a standpoint of a hearer's understanding of what is said to him, I claim that in an ordinary situation if a hearer understands what is said to him, then he has understood the meaning thereof. That is, if the speaker says "Close the door," and the hearer understands that he is thereby being requested to close the door, then he has understood the meaning of the request, "Close the door." I further claim that the same principle works in religious illocutionary acts. That is, a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act.

This conclusion, however, creates a serious problem. In an ordinary illocutionary act--for example, a request to close the door--what is referred to in a request, namely, "the door," does not present the kind of philosophical problem for understanding as *does* the word "God," who is being addressed in a religious illocutionary act of prayer. This is because the reality of God cannot be taken literally in the same sense as the reality of a physical object. This is the problem to which I try to respond in chapter 4, through a discussion of religious truth claims.

Now the basic problem concerning religious truth claims is not as it has been mistakenly supposed in the traditional philosophy of religion. It is not to offer a "proof," which is to address the question "Can you prove it?" but to respond to a logically prior question of whether a religious truth claim is an intelligible truth claim at all. I suggest that a critic's definition of intelligibility in terms of something being "empirically grounded in human experience" narrowing it down to those things that can be pointed at, shown, identified with, etc., is too restrictive. If the concept of being "empirically grounded in human experience" be given a wider meaning, I claim that it makes sense to speak of such things as religious experience and revelation being grounded in actual human experience, thereby to say that they have anchorage in the real world.

There are, however, several serious objections to this suggestion. But if the arguments presented in the last chapter are valid, they show that the critics have failed to discredit conclusively the theist's claim

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that religious experience and revelation do have empirical anchorage; and if they have empirical anchorage then they do meet the demand of empiricism for intelligibility; and if they are intelligible then we can take them as valid clues leading to knowledge claims concerning religious truth.

Thus we may have partially succeeded in establishing the fact that religious language can be both meaningful and true.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

What is Religious Language?

It would save us much trouble if we could find some clear answer to the question, "What is religious language?" Unfortunately, no clear answer is forthcoming either from philosophers of religion or from Christian theologians.

One of the reasons for this is that philosophers as well as Christian theologians are divided in their opinions about the question whether there *is* such a thing as religious language. Nielsen thinks that there is no such special language; there are only natural languages such as German, English, French, Hindi and so on.

> There is no 'religious language' or 'scientific language.' There is rather the international notation of mathematics and logic; and English, French, German and the like. In short, 'religious discourse' and 'scientific discourse' are part of the same overall conceptual structure.[1]

On the other hand, there are some philosophers of religion, like the late Ian T. Ramsey, who believe that there *is* religious language. Contrasting it with ordinary language Ramsey calls religious language "logically odd" language.[2] And there are others who think that religious

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[1]Kai Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism" in *Philosophy* XLII, 1967, p. 201.

[2]Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

language is not different from ordinary everyday language. For example, Hall says: "It is my contention that religious language is not different in kind from 'ordinary public language' or from any other language stratum..."[3]

The same view is also expressed by others like Garnett who say that religious utterances "can be held literally and stated in terms derived from ordinary realistic language."[4] It appears to me, if we are to discuss whether or not religious language is meaningful, whether or not it has its own logic, we have to grant the minimum presupposition that there is such a thing as religious language. If we do not grant even this minimum presupposition I find it hard to understand how can one seriously ask whether or not religious language is meaningful, whether or not it has its own special logic. It will be my contention, assuming that there *is* religious language, that religious utterances are cognitively meaningful, that is, they are empirically grounded in the real world, and that they have strong kinship to everyday use of ordinary language. Therefore, the primary concern of the thesis will be to define in what sense religious utterances are empirical, and thereby to say in what sense they are cognitively meaningful, and in what way way they are related to everyday use of ordinary language.

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[3] R. C. Hall, "Is there a Special Religious Language?" in *Anglican Theological Review* 64, 1964, p. 89.

[4] A. Campbell Garnett, "The Problem of Meaning. A New Frontier in Philosophy and Theology" in *Encounter* 22, 1962, p. 246.

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Definition of Religious Language

The prior question, it appears to me, is this: how does one *conceive* religious language, or how does one *define* religious language?

There are many contemporary philosophers of religion who found it "impossible to come up with a satisfactory definition of religion which is not too narrow or too broad."[5] Thus Binkley points out: "Contemporary linguistic philosophers, especially those in England, have abandoned the craving for definition of such terms as religion..."[6]

For some such reasons some philosophers of religion have taken another line of study. They study "the nature of religious language, how it is used, how it functions, and what kind of meaning it may have."[7] Some philosophers of religion have found this approach more promising. Of those philosophers who have taken this line of study, I would like to mention Binkley and Klemke.

Following the thought of the late L. Wittgenstein, Binkley characterizes the use of religious language into seven categories: (i) empirical, (ii) tautological, (iii) emotive, (iv) performative or ceremonial, (v) prescriptive, (vi) mythical and (vii) paradoxical usages.[8] Religious lan-

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[5] L. J. Binkley, "What Characterises Religious Language?" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2, 1962, p. 18.

[6] Ibid., p. 18.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., pp. 19-21.

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guage, he believes "is an odd or extraordinary use of ordinary language." But he does not believe that

> any one type of usage of religious language can be called basic or primary, but rather that what we have here is a multitudinous use of language in as many different ways as possible in order to achieve what Ian Ramsey calls "discernment."[9]

Note that Binkley, unlike most contemporary philosophers, denies any one central use of religious language. However, as Hick points out, Binkley has missed the central issue of religious language in his account for this very reason.[10]

In his similar studies of the nature of religious language, Klemke claims that there are "many kinds of religious sentences which are non-statements."[11] That is, there are religious sentences which are used as (i) commands or exhortations, (ii) prayers, (iii) blessings, (iv) questions, and (v) ejaculations.[12] Then there are many religious sentences which appear to assert something but are only apparent assertions. "Faith moves mountains" is an apparent assertion and is not to be interpreted literally. There are, however, religious sentences which are assertive, and are to be interpreted literally. This includes descriptive religious sentences as "Many Christians pray everyday." Then there are still others

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[9] Binkley, "What Characterises Religious Language?", p. 22.

[10] cf. John Hick, "Comment" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 2, 1962, pp. 22-24.

[11] E. D. Klemke, "Are Religious Statements Meaningful?" in *The Journal of Religion* 40, 1960, p. 28.

[12] Ibid., p. 28.

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which Klemke calls "explanations." What he calls explanatory sentences include such utterances as "The lack of rain in X is due to the people's sinfulness." Some religious utterances are historical claims and they are of two kinds: that which can be verified in practice and that which can be verified only in principle. "Jesus was born in Bethlehem" can be verified in practice, and "Jesus rose from the dead" can be verified only in principle. Then there are also religious utterances which Klemke calls "autobiographical statements" or "testimonies." According to him, "I am convinced that Christ died for me" is an autobiographical statement. Then finally, there is a group of religious utterances which some philosophers have given the term, "God-statements" or "first order religious discourse." The following utterances belong to this group: "God exists." "God has created the world." "God loves us." "Jesus is the son of God."[13]

Contemporary philosophers of religion primarily associate the problem of religious language with the sort of utterances belonging to first order religious discourse. That is, the problem of religious language is primarily concerned with first order religious discourse or "God-statements." We will see soon why such religious utterances when used as assertions give rise to serious philosophical problems.

Then there are other philosophers who, following the thought of the late J. L. Austin, analyze religious language in terms of "speech-act." This group of philosophers take seriously the person who speaks, the oc-

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[13]Klemke, "Are Religious Statements Meaningful?", pp. 27-37.

casion in which he speaks, along with its linguistic features. Among others, James McClendon and James Smith have taken this line of analysis.[14]

As I understand them, this group of philosophers are not very happy with the Wittgensteinian analysis of religious language. The Wittgensteinian analysis of religious language in terms of many uses of language or "language-games" appears to have left out two important elements, namely the speaker and the situation. The Austinian analysis of religious language takes, along with linguistic features, both the speaker and the situation very seriously.

It will be my contention (as it will be seen later) that religious language is better analyzed in terms of speech-acts than in terms of "language-game" theory or any other theories I know of. We will examine various "theories" of religions language in chapter 2.

The Problem of Religious Language

As stated above, religious language has many uses and not all the uses give rise to serious philosophical problems. Many contemporary philosophers of religion, as pointed out, think that there is only one group of religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse which give rise to serious philosophical problems. The group of utterances be-

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[14] James Wm. McClendon, Jr. and James M. Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). "Religious Language after J. L. Austin" in *Religious Studies* 8, 1972, pp. 58-59. Donald Evans, *The Logic of Self Involvement* (London: SCM, 1963).

longing to first order religious discourse are of the following type: "There is a God who is the maker of heaven and earth." "God loves us as the father loves his son." "Jesus is the son of God." "God has given us many blessings," and so on.

The problem associated with these utterances is expressed by Blackstone in these words: "Although on the surface they appear to be ordinary descriptive claim, they do not behave logically as ordinary descriptive claims."[15] Or we may state the problem thus: a religious sentence or an utterance containing the word, God, either explicitly or implicitly, when used as an assertion, such a sentence or an utterance, though it looks susceptible to normal or literal understanding, yet it cannot be thus understood or interpreted. This is the problem. In my understanding, this is *the* problem of religious language to which nearly all contemporary philosophers of religion will address themselves.

But how do we understand the problem? or what does it mean? The difficulty in interpreting the problem is that it amalgamates various other closely related problems. This is because different philosophers interpret the "normal" or "literal" meaning of ordinary assertion quite differently. That is, when philosophers say that an ordinary assertion is capable of normal or literal interpretation they may mean that it can be true or false, that is, that it can be verified or falsified, or alternately, what is being asserted can be checked at least in principle, or

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[15] R. H. Ayers and W. T. Blackstone, eds., *Religious Language and Knowledge* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 4.

identified often by pointing at, or what is being asserted can be confirmed or disconfirmed by certain empirical data, or even that it can be taken for what it actually says. The problems associated with various of these qualifications may not be of the same type, and yet in some sense they will have what may be described as "empirical backing."

And sometimes these qualifications are described by contemporary philosophers of religion as the essential *conditions* for the cognitively meaningful use of language; and sometimes some of these conditions are also described as the "method" by which a cognitively meaningful use of language is to be established; contemporary philosophers often do not maintain a clear distinction between the conditions and the method by which a meaningful use of language is to be established. And the actual terms they use to describe the "method" also vary greatly. Different philosophers use different terms--"verifiability," "falsifiability," "checkability," "confirmability," "identifiability," etc.--to describe the method. Though the actual terms used to describe the method may differ, yet the method they use will always be an empirical method.

Thus in its details the problem complicates a great deal; but in general, the problem is quite simple. It is suggested that to say an ordinary assertion is capable of normal or literal interpretation means that it can be true or false, etc.; that is, it will fulfill some of the conditions required for the meaningful use of language, and whether the conditions are fulfilled or not can be tested by the use of empirical methods described above. But a religious sentence or an utterance con-

taining the word, "God," when used as an assertion, though on the surface it looks as if it can be interpreted as an ordinary assertion, yet cannot be thus interpreted or understood. This means, according to the critics, that a religious sentence containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion cannot be true or false; that it cannot be verified or falsified; or alternatively that what is being asserted can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed by a reference to an empirical anchorage. In short, it cannot be interpreted or understood literally.

Thus contemporary philosophers of religion argue that if a religious sentence or an utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion be a genuine assertion, it should be capable of being interpreted as an ordinary assertion. That is, it should fulfill some of the conditions which an ordinary assertion fulfills, and since these conditions are the essential conditions for having cognitive or literal meaning, the critics draw the conclusion that no religious sentence or utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion, can be said to have cognitive or empirical meaning.

To illustrate, we note that by the above given definition of the problem of religious language, "My God! Did you do that?", although it has the word, "God," yet it will not create a serious philosophical problem. The sentence is not *about* God, that is, the word, "God," has no truth-function. However, "Did someone make the world?" or "Is there someone behind the world?" will generate serious philosophical problems, because although these questions look as if they can be understood as "Who

made this watch?" or "Who is behind the house?" yet they cannot be thus interpreted or understood. What this means is that, as Wisdom explains it:

> "Did someone make the world?" "Is there someone behind it all?" This seems as if it could be answered like "Who made this watch?" "Who laid out this garden?" "Is there a master mind behind all these seemingly disconnected crimes?" But it can't be answered in that way. It couldn't be. What I mean is this: When you are told that there is someone, God, who brings the young lions their prey and feeds the cattle upon a thousand hills, it is natural to think that if you watch, perhaps, in the hush at dawn or sunset, you will see something to confirm this statement. You watch. What d'you see? Antelopes feeding perhaps, or zebras come down to drink. A lion springs--with wonderful acceleration it is true--but still his own acceleration. And if anything saves that zebra it's the way he comes round on his hocks and gets going. There are the stars and flowers and the animals. But there's no one to be seen. And no one to be heard. There's the wind and there's the thunder but if you call there's no answer except the echo of your own voice.[16]

Such utterances as "God brings the young lions their prey" and "God feeds the cattle upon a thousand hills" when used as assertions then create the problem because as the critics understand them, what is being asserted can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed by an empirical reference. That is, however diligently one might watch, he would never see God's feeding of the young lions nor the cattle as he would see Mrs. Don's feeding of her chickens. But if such religious utterances have literal meaning, the critics want to maintain that we should be able to see God's feeding of the young lions and the cattle as we would see Mrs. Don's feeding of her chickens; or that there would be an empirically identifiable

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[16] John Wisdom, *Paradox and Discovery* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), p. 10.

situations when it would be proper to say, "Look, God is bringing the young lions their prey now! Look, God is feeding the cattle upon a hill now!" as there would be situations when it would be proper to say, "Look, Mrs. Don is feeding her chickens now!" etc.

Or consider "Jesus is the son of God." The word, "son," the critics would suggest, looks as if it could be understood just as "John is the son of James." Yet it cannot be, because God has no wife! And the word, "God," looks like an ordinary proper name just as "Tom" is. But it cannot be. The difference between "Who is God?" and "Who is Tom?" is not a matter of degree but of kind. The problem is expressed by Crombie in these words:

> ...the question "Who is God?" is proper, and on that account the statement appears to be direct and does not have to be reduced; and yet although the question is proper, there is an important sense in which it cannot be answered. There is such an operation as introducing somebody to Tom, but there is no such operation as introducing somebody to God; or rather if there are operations which may, from the standpoint of faith, be so described, it is so only from the standpoint, and they differ vitally from ordinary introductions. If a child asks, "Who is God?" he can only be given statements (such as "He made us") by way of answer. He can never be brought into a situation in which it is proper to say, "This is God."[17]

It is not only that there can never be a situation in which it is proper to say "This is God", as it would be in the case of "This is Tom", but there are other difficulties which do not permit us to interpret, the critic insists, such an utterance in an ordinary way. True, we speak of

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[17] I. M. Crombie, "The Possibility of Theological Statements" in B. Mitchell, ed., *Faith and Logic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp. 39-40.

God's love as we do of Tom's love; but the point is God has no romance as Tom might have! God walks, but he has no legs! We speak of his hands, but he has no body; he can hear, but he has no ears; he speaks, but he has no mouth; he sees, but he has no eyes; he knows, but he has no brain! If God sees, hears, speaks, comes and goes like we human beings do, the critics are quick to point out that God must have a body.[18] But a believer will now allow this suggestion. He would consider it a gross misunderstanding. Whatever may be the meaning of such utterances, a believer will not allow that such utterances can be interpreted in quite the same way as we would interpret their counterpart of ordinary assertive utterances.

Consider for example, "God loves us." Its meaning cannot be taken in quite the same way as "Mary loves her children." Of course, it would be very difficult to know with certainty whether or not Mary loves her children. All the available evidence may suggest that she loves her children, and yet she may not; conversely, all the available evidence may suggest that she does not love her children; nonetheless, she may love them. However, the point is, as Flew will insist, if we are talking about an actual love of Mary, when certain available explanations, evidences are taken into consideration, we may be fully justified in saying "Mary loves/does not love her children."[19] Thus in the case of Mary's love, certain

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[18]Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp. 119ff.

[19]A. Flew, "The Falsification Response" in *Religious Studies* 5-6, 1969-1970, p. 78.

empirical data are relevant either to confirm or disconfirm the truth of the assertion "Mary loves her children."

However, it is suggested that the situation is quite different in the case of God's loving us. This is, as Flew argues, "God loves us" is often used as compatible with *any* situation in the Christian theology. There is no situation in which it would be proper to say "God loves us" is false. But if "God loves us" is "unfalsifiable," what ascertainable meaning can it have? Because, Flew argues, to assert that such is the case is necessarily to deny that such is not the case. And to know the meaning of what is being asserted is to know what it denies.[20] Thus Flew challenges the believer: "Just what would have to happen not merely...to tempt but also logically...to entitle us to say 'God does not love us.'"[21] Or as Nielsen describes it:

> Flew's challenge is just this: Believers take their central religious affirmations to be factual truth-claims, but if they actually are such truth claims, it must be possible (logically possible) with respect to any religious truth claims, on the one hand, to describe two empirically identificable but distinct situations or states, one of which actually obtains when the religious statement in question is true, the other when it is false, or, on the other hand and less determinately, at least if it obtains, we have good grounds for saying that religious statement in question is true, and if the other obtains, we have good grounds for saying that it is false. If it is impossible even to conceive of any such conditions, then the putatively factual religious statement is neither true nor false. And thus it is not a factual statement at all. Flew's challenge is a challenge to the believer to state these conditions of confirmation or infirmation for central theistic claims, e.g., "God governs the world," "God loves mankind" and "There is a God."[22]

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[20] A. Flew's contribution to "Theology and Falsification" in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955), p. 96.

[21] Ibid, p. 99.

[22] Kai Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 57.

Flew's challenge is then, if religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse are assertions, there should be situations in which, when obtained, it will be proper to say that "God loves us" is true, or "God loves us" is false. But since a believer allows no situation to falsify his claims, and since whatever happens he wants to qualify it saying, "Yes, but..." making it compatible with any situation, Flew claims that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse cannot be meaningful. In Flew's words, religious language of this kind is "killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications."

We may now state the problem of religious language thus: the critics start noticing that there is a striking grammatical similarity between the uses of religious language as assertions and their counterpart uses in ordinary assertions. However, the similarity between these two assertive uses is a mere grammatical resemblance. Then they try to interpret a religious sentence used as an assertion in a way they normally understand an ordinary assertion. They notice that this they cannot do. And this is exactly what the problem is as they see it. At this stage, the problem appears to be rather trivial; it does not appear even worth considering.

Then in the second stage of the argument we saw that since religious utterances containing the word, "God," when used as assertions cannot be interpreted as ordinary assertions, it is now argued that they cannot be even assertions. That is, they are not capable of making factual statements. We saw the reasons for this denial. The reasons being that if a

religious utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion were an assertion, it should fulfill some of the conditions which ordinary assertions fulfill. That is, it can be true or false; or what is being asserted can either be confirmed or disconfirmed by certain empirical data; or its referents can be identified with or pointed at by an empirical reference and so on. But a religious utterance or a sentence which contains the word, "God," when used as an assertion fulfills none of these conditions. Therefore, the critics conclude that they cannot be assertions.

Finally, since these conditions are the essential conditions for any cognitively meaningful use of language, and since no religious utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion fulfills these conditions, they now conclude that a religious utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion, cannot be said to have literal or cognitive meaning. That is, such a use of religious language cannot be said to be grounded in the real world. Or as Nielsen would prefer to state it, religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse are conceptually "incoherent"; they are not intelligible talk at all.

However, we should also note that it would be a mistake to suppose that the contemporary critics of religion *flatly* deny any meaning to religious utterances. This is not so. As Nielsen says:

> In raising fundamental questions about the intelligibility and/or rationality of the alleged truth-claims of religion, there is no claim on the part of these critics of religion that religious discourse is flatly meaningless... What is claimed is that they are not capable of stating facts or making genuine truth-claims.[23]

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[23]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 10.

It should be noted, then, contemporary critics of religion allow that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse may have some other meaning such as "emotive, ceremonial, or pseudofactual (ideological) meaning."[24] And the problem described above should not be confused with the problem traditionally posed by an atheist or an agnostic.

> It is important not to confuse this view of religious assertions with the view that is adopted by atheists or agnostics. For it is characteristic of an agnostic to hold that the existence of a god is a possibility in which there is no good reason either to believe or disbelieve; and it is characteristic of an atheist to hold that it is at least probable that no god exists. And our view of all utterances about the nature of God are nonsensical, so far from being identical with, or even lending any support to either of these familiar contentions, is actually incompatible with them. For if the assertion that there is a god is nonsensical, then the athiest's assertion that there is no god is equally nonsensical.[25]

Thus the problem presented above "undercuts religion at a much more fundamental point than either atheism or agnosticism."[26] It is because the problem does not merely "challenge the *truth* of assertions about God, but press(es) the logically prior question whether such assertions even have meaning."[27]

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[24]Kai Neilsen, "Can Faith Validate God-Talk?" in *Theology Today* 20, 1963, p. 161.

[25]A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Second Edition (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1946), p. 115.

[26]W. T. Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 14.

[27]S. M. Ogden, *The Reality of God and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 25.

The Issue of Cognitive Meaning

The problem of religious language as we have tried to explain it in the preceding pages may also be considered from the specific view point of cognitive meaning. One of the central issues of the contemporary debate concerning religious meaning is, whether or not religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse can be true or false, that is, whether or not they are cognitively meaningful.

It is sometimes difficult to know what philosophers like Ayer, Flew, Nielsen mean by "cognitive meaning" since they also use some such terms as "empirical meaning," "literal meaning," "factual content," "factual meaning" as synonyms of cognitive meaning without specifying what distinction if any is intended. It appears to me, if one undertakes a careful analysis of these terms in detail, which I do not intend to do in the present thesis, it may be possible to show that these terms do not always carry the same meaning; or at least to claim that for them to carry the same meaning requires a justification which the positivists as far as I know have not offered.

Be that as it may. Our present concern is with the issue of cognitive meaning. Since Nielsen by general recognition "is one of the most forceful proponents of the view that theological assertions have no factual reference"[28], taking him as a paradigm example of those who want to

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[28]Paul Clifford, "The Factual Reference of Theological Assertion" in *Religious Studies* 3, 1967, p. 339.

deny the cognitive meaning of religious utterances, I want to examine his view of cognitive meaning.

Nielsen, as a previously quoted passage shows, does not assert that religious utterances are flatly meaningless. He agrees that religious utterances have some meaning--emotive, ceremonial, pseudofactual and so on. He also allows that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse (such as "God exists," "God loves us," "God governs the world," "Jesus is the son of God"), when interpreted as "predictive, descriptive, explanatory hypothesis, or autobiographical claims," are cognitively meaningful. Thus when philosophers like Nielsen deny that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse are cognitively meaningful, they mean this in some very restrictive sense.

Nielsen's understanding of cognitive meaning appears to be that all cognitively meaningful use of language must fulfill certain conditions (we have referred to some of these conditions, cf., p. 12); whether or not an utterance fulfills these conditions can be tested by certain methods (we also have referred to some of the methods, cf. p. 12); Nielsen uses the method of "confirmability" or "infirmability" in order to test whether or not a putative claim is really a genuine claim. One of the conditions which all cognitively meaningful use of language must fulfill is this: according to Nielsen, all cognitively meaningful use of language *can be true or false*. But what does this mean? As I understand him, he means "True (or false) in the same way or at least in a very similar way

that statements about the external world are true (or false)."[29] Thus, "There is a chair in my room," "John lives in Berkeley" are cognitively meaningful utterances because they can be true or false; but "There is a God," or "God lives in heaven," although such utterances are also intended to be putative claims (utterances which allegedly are used to make statements which are either true or false), yet they are neither true nor false. Therefore, they are not cognitively meaningful.

But, if asked why "'John lives in Berkeley' can be true or false whereas 'God lives in heaven' is neither?" Nielsen's reply is that in the case of the former certain empirical data are relevant either to confirm or disconfirm the putative truth claims, whereas in the case of the latter they are not.

Of course, by "empirical data" he does not seem to mean only those data which we can see, feel, smell and touch. He does not seem to restrict himself to such observable things as tables and chairs, and colors as green, red, and yellow. He realizes if he did, not only would he have to deny metaphysical and theological utterances as having cognitive meaning, but many everyday uses of language would have to be ruled out as well, which he does not want to do.

> If we take the heroic course of sticking with such an empiricist criterion of meaning while restricting the category object-words to those words whose referents are directly observable, or to those words which stand for sensible things or properties of things, i.e., to nouns like "table" or adjective like "red," then we simply rule out as meaningless not merely metaphysical and theological words but everyday words integral to scientific and commonsense discourse. But this commits us to treating as mean-

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[29] Neilsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 11.

ingless words which no empiricist or anyone else in his right mind would wish to rule out as meaningless.[30]

Sometimes, he also seems to be saying that the native or the fluent speaker of the language by their linguistic intuition can tell whether or not an utterance can be true or false.[31] Thus, if challenged "How do you know that 'x' can be true or false whereas 'y' is neither?" his reply is, "We just do!" In this Nielsen believes that he is simply appealing to a "commonsense" knowledge. I suppose that he wants to claim that everyone knows that "The cat is on the mat," "The sun is shining," Jim is five feet, ten inches, has blue eyes, dark hair, weighs one hundred forty pounds," "Jesus is born in Bethlehem," "Every Christian prays daily" are plain matter-of-fact empirical statements which can be true or false, whereas "God governs the world," "Jesus is God Incarnate" are neither. The former utterances are cognitively meaningful, whereas the latter are not.

But it is dubious whether such an appeal to linguistic intuition or commonsense knowledge claims can be a sure guide. If it were, then it is hard to know why two native speakers or two believers in commonsense knowledge should disagree whether or not an utterance is cognitively meaningful, yet we know that such disagreements occur.

Then according to Nielsen, all cognitively meaningful utterances are *confirmable or infirmable* in principle. "But a statement only has factual significance if it is at least verifiable (confirmable or infirmable) in

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[30]Neilsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 36.

[31]Cf. Ibid., pp. 60, 85.

principle."[32] But what does this mean? Nielsen means that there are central putative truth claims in Judeo-Christian tradition, such as the claim that "God governs the world," which at least purport to be factual truth claims, that is, such claims are believed in Judeo-Christian tradition as cognitively meaningful. However, if such a claim as "God governs the world" is a genuine factual truth claim, that is, if it is a real cognitive claim, then what is being asserted must exclude some conceivable happening, event, or empirically identifiable process or state; or what is being asserted, at least must be "confirmable" or "infirmable" in principle by non-religious, straight-forwardly empirical, factual statements.[33] (The term "statement" is Nielsen's own.) This means that an utterance would never unequivocally count as a factual utterance unless it were at least in principle confirmable or infirmable, that is, unless some conceivable, empirically determinate state of affairs would count *against* its truth and some at least conceivable, empirically determinable state of affairs would count *for* its truth. That is, if religious utterances are really cognitively meaningful; then there must be two separate but distinct situations, one of which when obtained will enable us to say, at least in principle, that a religious claim is true, and the other when obtained will enable us to say that it is false. In this Nielsen claims that one is not maintaining that meaningful assertions are falsifiable

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[32]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 28.

[33]Ibid., p. 56.

by some empirical state of affairs, or some propositions with empirical content, but that, if a meaningful utterance is used to make a factual statement, this utterance in order to be a genuine factual claim must, in principle, be "confirmable" or "infirmable" by some proposition or set of propositions with empirical content.[34]

> That is to say, a putatively factual statement actually has factual significance (is factually meaningful, has factual content) only if some differential experience is relevant to its truth or falsity.[35]

Now Nielsen agrees that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse such as "God governs the world", if interpreted to mean "Riots, plagues, loss of faith, wars, are taken by some to count against the claim that God governs the world; human love, a sense of the numinous, concern for social justice, and a commitment to human solidarity are taken by some to count for it," are cognitively meaningful.[36] But this is not what the sophisticated believer wants to claim. As he points out:

> There is, however, a strong tendency among the sophisticated faithful to treat religious claims in such a way that they are not even in our weak sense confirmable or infirmable. It is customary for such believers to maintain that there is no experience or set of experiences, either from without or from within, that could possibly destroy religious faith. The central claimsof Christianity, for example, are taken to be completely immune to disconfirmation by anything we could learn

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[34]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 57. Cf. *Scepticism*. (London: Macmillan, 1973), Chaps. 1-2.

[35]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 58.

[36]Ibid., p. 60.

> from science or history or by any conceivable empirical observation or rational argument. The central doctrinal claims of Christianity are thought to be factual assertions, but factual assertions of a unique sort. They are the fundamental absolute presuppositions of the faith. They underlie the possibility of empirical test for more specific factual assertions, but they are not themselves even in principle confirmable or infirmable. When this turn is taken, as it is so frequently in religious circles then...the key religious utterances of such people while remaining putatively factual, they have actually ceased to make any factual claim at all.[37]

The account given above of Nielsen's conception of cognitive meaning, though it does not cover the details of his arguments, gives us a fair representation of his central position. And as we have tried to explain it, that a cognitively meaningful use of language must fulfill the conditions of confirmability or infirmability at least in principle, that is, that there should be two separate but distinct situations: when one obtains we should be able to say that the putative truth claim is true, and when the other obtains, that it is false. Thus, when we come to the bottom of the argument, it does seem to mean, for example, when Mrs. Don feeds her chickens, then that will be the situation in which our saying "Mrs. Don is feeding her chickens now" is true; and when Mrs. Don is not feeding her chickens, then that will be the situation in which our saying, "Mrs. Don is feeding her chickens" is false. Now if "God feeds the cattle" were a genuine assertion, that is, if it were a cognitively meaningful use of language, then "God feeds the cattle," would, at least in principle, be confirmable or infirmable as it is in the case of Mrs. Don's feeding her chickens.

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[37]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 61.

But if "God feeds the cattle" is neither confirmable nor infirmable (usually expressed as "neither true nor false") as is "Mrs. Don feeds her chickens" a conclusion is drawn that "God feeds the cattle" is not a cognitively meaningful use of language.

This is the position maintained by the critics which we have expressed by saying that a religious sentence, or an utterance containing the word, "God," when used as an assertion cannot be understood, or interpreted as ordinary assertions; or that a religious utterance does not fulfill the conditions which an ordinary assertion fulfills.

In my understanding, this is the challenge to which nearly all the contemporary responses are directed. Some like R. M. Hare agree with the critics that religious utterances are neither true nor false, but insist that they are meaningful; others like John Hick totally disagree with the critics: for them religious utterances are true or false, that is, they are cognitively meaningful; while still others like D. Z. Phillips maintain that the critics are confused about the logic of religious language, etc. I will examine these and other responses shortly.

However, before we turn to the responses, there is another aspect of Nielsen's conception of cognitive meaning which I must mention. It is important to mention it, because it ties up with the basic contention of my thesis (cf. p. 6).

As stated, the critics' position is that all cognitively meaningful use of language can be true or false, that is, such a use of language is confirmable or infirmable at least in principle; religious utterances are neither; therefore, religious utterances are condemned as having no cog-

nitive meaning. However, the critics also admit that there are other uses of language which are neither true nor false, that is, they are neither confirmable nor infirmable, yet they are perfectly normal, literal, and cognitively meaningful. What sort of uses are the critics referring to? I quote:

> It is particularly evident that there are meaningful utterances, indeed, *cognitively* meaningful utterances, perfectly literal and quite informative, which do not even purport to be verifiable. Moreover, some of them are not in the slightest degree emotive. "Pass the butter," "The witness must answer the question," "Shoes worn in the rain should be polished," "What time is it?", "Be at the boat train at four," "When in a slide do not apply the brakes" are plainly meaningful, cognitive, ... [and] literal.[38]

The point of interest is this: "Pass me the butter" is a *request*; "The witness must answer the question" is an *order*; "What time is it" is a *question*, etc. If a "request," an "order," and a "question" are granted as perfectly normal, literal, and informative use of language, that is, if they are acknowledged as cognitively meaningful use of language, then I suggest that we must also grant that religious utterances are cognitively meaningful use of langugge. Undoubtedly this is what we do with our everyday uses of language, and this is what we do with our uses of religious language! In other words, I claim that a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act. (This is explained and defended in chapter 3.)

Let us now turn to the "responses" to the "challenge."

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[38]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 32.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Re-Statement of the Problem

The problem, as we set it out in chapter 1, is that while religious utterances which contain the word, "God" (whether explicitly or implicitly), used as an assertion, may appear to be open to normal or literal interpretation, they cannot be understood or interpreted in such a way. We also say that the real challenge of contemporary philosophy to religion is that if religious utterances are cognitively meaningful, it follows that there ought to be religious situations in which we can make theological assertions in straight-forwardly empirical terms. However, the nature of religious utterances is such, as the critics have observed, that no theologian or philosopher of religion who hopes to rely on the cognitivity of such utterances can speak successfully in those terms. Since straightforwardly empirical utterances which are open to the principle of verification or falsification are the only legitimate, intelligible, truth-claims, and since no religious truth-claims have been made in those terms with success, the conclusion has been drawn that no religious utterance is cognitively meaningful.

The denial of cognitive meaning to religious utterances, then, implies two things:

Certain conditions are made within which an utterance will be cognitively meaningful;

proof is then offered that a religious utterance belonging to first order religious discourse does not satisfy these conditions.

In our terminology the argument may now be stated thus:

a. A necessary condition for a cognitively meaningful use of language is that there should be a method by which one can determine, in principle, whether or not the anchorage of the use exists in the real world.

b. The only possible method for determining whether or not anything exists in the real world is the empirical method.

c. There is no empirical method by which we can determine whether or not an utterance belonging to first order religious discourse has an anchorage in the real world.

d. Thus religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse have no anchorage in the real world.

e. It follows that religious utterances belonging to first order religious discourse are not cognitively meaningful. That is, the central use of religious language cannot be said to be making factual claims about the real world.[39]

The critics who use this line of argument usually state (a) and (b) together; the greater part of the discussion is centered upon (a) while

[39]Cf. Anders Jeffner, *The Study of Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1972, pp. 32f. For a shorter formulation, see J. H. Gill, "The Meaning of Religious Language" in *Christianity Today* 9, 1965, p. 16.

(b) is hardly ever discussed. However, it does not seem unreasonable to make a distinction between (a) and (b)—that is, between the conditions and the methods used to determine whether the required conditions are met or not.

Having thus stated the problem of religious language we should first have a look around at the contemporary literature which tries to respond to the problem.

The First Look Around

When we look at the contemporary literature which deals with the problem it becomes clear that many attempts have been made to answer it. There are those who argue that logical empiricism is dead, and that the verification principle of meaning has long since been abandoned. However, it is arguable that those who reject the problem as outlined above ought to offer some method other than the empirical one by which we can gain knowledge of the real world. They ought to be able to demonstrate by their suggested method that religious language belonging to first order religious discourse either has or lacks a reference to the real world. It appears to me that many contemporary theories of religious language may be described as making an attempt to furnish a viable theory of epistemology which will show either that the premise itself is unsupported, or that the conclusion does not follow from it. Remembering this, if we look at the contemporary literature we find:

1. Those who partially agree with the critics that religious utterances are not assertions in any ordinary sense, but who disagree

with the critics that religious utterances are nonsensical. They believe that religious utterances are meaningful in some important sense.[40]

2. Those who totally disagree with the critics. They believe that the critics are wrong on two counts:
   a. they are wrong when they say that religious utterances are not assertions;
   b. and they are wrong when they say that religious utterances are neither true nor false.

   This group believes that religious utterances *are* true or false and are therefore cognitively meaningful.[41]

3. Those who want to confront the challenge. They think that the critics have failed to state their case in clear and coherent terms,

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[40] R. M. Hare's contribution to "Theology and Falsification" in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955), pp. 99-103. R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955). Thomas McPherson, "Religion as the Inexpressible: in Flew and MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 131-43.

[41] Basil Mitchell, *Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973). "Justification of Religious Belief" in *Philosophical Quarterly* 2, 1961, pp. 213-26. *Faith and Logic* (ed.) (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957). *Philosophy of Religion* (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967). *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973). *Faith and the Philosophers* (ed.) (New York: St. Martin's, 1964). I. T. Ramsey, *Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1957). *Christian Discourse* (London: OUP, 1965).

and to indicate which version of the verification principle of meaning they are advocating.[42]

4. Those whom Nielsen calls "Wittgensteinien Fideists." These philosophers maintain that the critics are "confused" about the logic of religious language. They hold the view that there are different modes of discourse, and each mode of discourse has its own logic or criterion of meaning. Since this is so, they hold that it is arbitrary to introduce external criteria by which to determine whether or not an utterance is meaningful. They hold that each mode of discourse is to be judged by its own standard or criterion of meaning as to whether it is meaningful or nonsensical.[43]

5. A group of thinkers whose primary concern, in my opinion, is theological rather than philosophical, of whom some like Paul van Buren say that to use religious language is to speak along the "edges" of language.[44] What they mean by this is not completely clear to me, but what is evident is that this view understands that language can

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[42]G. I. Mavrodes, "God and Verification" in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10, 1964, pp. 187-91. J. Kellenberger, "The Falsification Challenge" in *Religious Studies* 5, 1969, pp. 169-84. *Religious Discovery, Faith and Knowledge* (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).

[43]D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965). *Faith and Philosophical Inquiry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977). Peter Winch, *The Idea of Social Science* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958). "Understanding a Primitive Society" in *The American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1964, pp. 307-25.

[44]Paul van Buren, *The Edges of Language* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).

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be used at many levels. There are "home-field" uses of language, and uses along the edges. In between these two areas of usage, there are various other levels of use. In the home-field uses of language the rules are well-defined and their applications are clearly marked; language is clear, unambiguous, and straight-forward. However, the use of language along the edges is different; here the rules are less clearly defined and their applications less clearly marked. Moreover, there are people, van Buren reminds us, who find attempts to restrict language to its home-field usage as "too narrow an exercise of language."[45] They have a longing to push language to its limit, "to the limit of their convention for their usage."[46] Of course, as van Buren tells us, if we try to go further, we fall off the edges"into the misuse of language, into nonsensical jabberings, into the void where the rules give out."[47] Thus, to use religious language is not to use language in the home-field with well-governed rules of usage, but to use it along the borders or edges of language.[48]

Then theologians like Bultmann and Tillich are firm in maintaining that we make nonsense out of religious language if we try to understand it literally. Religious language is not meant to be understood or interpreted

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[45] van Buren, *The Edges of Language*, p. 100.

[46] Ibid., p. 112

[47] Ibid., p. 88

[48] Ibid., p. 158.

in such a fashion. According to Bultmann it is "mythical;"[49] according to Tillich, "symbolic."[50]

The various views listed above are neither complete nor exhaustive; but they give us enough scope to proceed with our studies. Of course, it would be impossible to examine all the various views in great detail. What I propose to do, therefore, is to examine the first two theories in greater detail, to make a passing remark about the third and fourth positions,

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[49]Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology" in H. W. Bartsch, ed., *Kerygma and Myth*, translated by R. H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), pp. 1-16. *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribner, 1952).

In Bultmann's understanding, the total language of the New Testament is mythical: the biblical conception of the world as a "three-storied structure with the earth in the centre, the heaven above, and the underworld beneath," the talk about heaven being the abode of God and his angels, about hell being the place of torment, and the miracles being divine interventions, the conception of revelation as God's making himself known through various media, the understanding that the present world and its human inhabitants are under the control of daemonic powers and thus stand in need of redemption, the conception of incarnation, ascension, and the future expectation of the *parousia*, are all examples of mythical language. ("New Testament and Mythology," pp. 1, 4, 5, 15.)

Bultmann believes that the New Testament message which is a "man's understanding of himself in the world in which he lives" lies embedded behind the mythical language. Therefore, he offers a program of demythologizing in order to reach the deeper truth, not by "cleaning up" myths, but by reinterpreting them. (Ibid., p. 12)

[50]Paul Tillich, *Theology and Culture* (New York: OUP, 1959). *Systematic Theology* I, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955). "The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols" in S. Hooke, ed., *Religious Experience and Truth* (New York: University of New York Press, 1961), pp. 3-11.

For Tillich, all our talk about God, except "God is being-itself" is symbolic. (*Systematic Theology* I, p. 264). The talk about God's personality, love, power, justice, his essence and existence, his activities such as creation, revelation, is all symbolic. ("The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols," pp. 8-9).

and to say nothing more about the last. Given the concern of this thesis, only the first two theories are important and relevant, namely the Non-cognitivist and the Cognitivist theories of religious language.

The Non-cognitivist Theory of Religious Language

When Logical Positivists launched an attack on religious discourse, some forty years ago, they pronounced it "devoid of factual meaning" along with ethical and metaphysical statements, on the ground that religious utterances are neither verifiable nor falsifiable, Many religious thinkers, as Gill points out, "were at a loss as to how to respond to such a challenge, except to deny it."[51] The significant development, however, began in the 1950's when some religious thinkers started to respond to the Positivists' challenge seriously.[52] The theory which I call "the non-cognitivist theory of religious language" is one of these earlier attempts. The theory briefly stated is this:

> That Positivists are correct that religious utterances are not assertions in any ordinary sense. Religious utterances are neither true nor false; they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable. However, Positivists are wrong when they say that re-

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[51] J. H. Gill, "The Meaning of Religious Language," p. 16. Even as late as 1960 some philosophy professors still complained about the inadequate response received from theologians. Cf. E. D. Klemke, "Are Religious Statements Meaningful?" in *Journal of Religion* 40, 1960, p. 27.

[52] The first serious attempt to have a dialogue on this topic within analytical philosophy can be found in the collected papers in A. Flew and A. MacIntyre, eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (SCM, 1955).

ligious utterances are nonsensical. They are not nonsense, this theory affirms; indeed, they are meaningful in some important sense.[53]

There are many contemporary philosophers of religion who have taken this line of defence. Their basic attempt is to show that the conclusion which Positivists draw does not follow from the premises. So they try to define the "sense" in which religious utterances are meaningful. Two such philosophers I want to examine are R. M. Hare and R. B. Braithwaite.

R. M. Hare: Religious Utterances as Bliks

R. M. Hare makes it very clear that he does not think that religious utterances are factual assertions. Given their ground, Hare maintains that Positivists have "come out completely victorious." There is, however, Hare believes, a way to show that positivists are wrong. He does this by shifting the ground; he narrates a parable of a paranoid undergraduate who is convinced that all Oxford dons are out to kill him. No matter how many gentle and mild dons he has met his reaction to every one remains the same: "Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he is really

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[53]We may also note that the positivists themselves offer such a defense. A. J. Ayer, for example, grants that religious utterances have "emotive" meaning, but they are not statement of facts, that is, they have no factual meaning. (Cf. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Chap. VI.)

[54]R. M. Hare's contribution to "Theology and Falsification," p. 99.

plotting against me the whole time like the rest of them; I know it I tell you."[55]

The undergraduate will accept no state of affairs, no situation as counting against his belief. Of course, we would say that such an undergraduate is deluded. But deluded of what? Is he deluded about the truth or falsity of the assertion? That cannot be, since he allows no situation, no state of affairs to count against his belief. Thus contrary to its appearance, "All dons are out to kill me" really asserts nothing.[56] But, Hare points out, "it does not follow that there is a difference between what he thinks about dons and what most of us think about them"; the difference is a difference of respective *bliks*; we have a sane *blik* and a lunatic has an insane *blik*.

On falsification criteria, a lunatic's *blik* is unfalsifiable. Therefore, a lunatic's *blik* is nonsensical. But Hare argues that the conclusion is wrong. "Bliks" are not nonsense. They express certain attitudes toward life, towards the world: "without *bliks* there can be no explanation" of the world.[57] *Bliks* are, then, pervasive attitudes within whose framework actual inferences and explanations take place. They express certain attitudes toward life, towards the world; therefore, they make a *difference* to those who hold them.

It is important to note that Hare is not saying that the lunatic alone has a *blik* and others do not. Hare maintains that both the lunatic and

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[55]Hare's contribution to "Theology and Falsification," p. 100.

[56]Ibid. [57]Ibid., p. 101

those who disagree with him about dons have *bliks*.[58] The difference is that a lunatic's *blik* is a wrong one, and other people's *blik* is a right one. So it is not a question of having or not having *bliks*, but of having a right or a wrong *blik*.

If Hare could establish that there is a difference between a lunatic's *blik* about dons and other people's *blik* about them, then he could have successfully argued to the meaningfulness of religious discourse. As I see it, however, Hare has failed to establish the difference.

I offer the following considerations: Hare argues that the lunatic has a *blik* about dons. We call it *blik* because the lunatic allows no situation, no state of affairs to count against his theory about dons. Thus on falsification criteria a lunatic's *blik* is not an assertion. But Hare argues that a *blik* is significant. It is the difference between our *blik* and the lunatic's *blik* that gives rise to our different responses towards the dons. But this argument sounds very strange! For on what grounds can we say that *bliks make* a difference? On what grounds can we say that there is a difference between the lunatic's insane *blik* and other people's sane *blik*? If *bliks* are nonassertive, that is, if no situation is relavent for *bliks*, surely there is no way which we can make a distinction between one *blik* and another. As Duff-Forbes says:

> If *both* the graduate *and* his friends have a blik about dons, that is to say, if the theories of both are compatible with anything and everything that can be observed about the behaviour of dons, then no state of affairs can count as between

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[58] Hare's contribution to "Theology and Falsification," p. 102.

> them. But then the ground for saying that one is a sane "blik" and the other an insane "blik" is gone. The language of "lunatic," "obsession," "insane" used of the graduate is simply the language of our "blik," as the language of "simple-minded," "stupidly trusting" and so on, used of us by the graduate, is the language of *his* blik. Hare has robbed himself of the ability to draw a distinction between the right and the wrong "blik." Or, at least, if he draws the distinction in the way that he does he is left with only *one* "blik," the lunatic's, and if he insists that *both* the lunatic and his friends have "bliks" about dons, he is deprived of the distinction he requires.[59]

Now it could be argued that the "difference" lies in the fact that the lunatic does not allow any observational behavior of the dons to count against his theory of them (that is why his *blik* is called "insane"), whereas most people would allow the behavior of the dons to count against their *bliks*. But this defense is futile, because a *blik* by Hare's definition is not an assertion. Thus, if most people's *bliks* are open to the principle of falsification, that is, if they allow certain observed behavior of the dons to count against their *bliks* then, on Hare's understanding of the nature of *bliks*, other people's *bliks* cannot be *bliks*. They are factual claims or assertions.

Then there is a further objection to Hare's concept of *blik*. The lunatic has a *blik* and those who disagree with him, as we have seen, have also *bliks*. On Hare's account the *blik* of those who disagree with the lunatic should also be compatible with any state of affairs; that is, their *blik* should also be nonassertive. Since this is the case they cannot allow any behavior of the dons to count against their theory of them.

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[59] D. R. Duff-Forbes, "Theology and Falsification Again" in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 39, 1961, p. 146.

So that if they were to see a group of dons heavily armed chasing after the lunatic, they would not take this as evidence against their *bliks*. However, this is quite contrary to our everyday practice. In everyday life, if they saw a group of dons heavily armed, chasing after the lunatic, they would justifiably take it as strong evidence against their theory. But on Hare's theory they cannot do this, since Hare holds the view that where any person holds a belief, against which he will allow no evidence to count, this belief and the negation of it are both nonassertive. But as we saw this presupposition is very dubious.

The fundamental dissatisfaction I have with Hare's account of religious language as "blik" is not so much with his understanding of a blik as some kind of metaphysical or ontological presupposition of the entire scientific and empirical inquiry without which no scientific inquiry and no empirical explanation of the world would have been possible. This is not my dissatisfaction. But I question his contention that there can be no rational choice between two rival "bliks" or presuppositions. Of course, Hare has failed to establish that such rational choice is not possible. Rational choice between two rival "bliks" is possible; however, it can only be made on the ground that religious utterances as "bliks" *can* be true or false. This means that certain observational or empirical data of some sort must be relevant to count against bliks. In other words, religious utterances must, in some important sense, be assertions.

R. B. Braithwaite: The Conative Theory of Religious Language

R. B. Braithwaite begins his analysis of religious language with the empiricist theory of meaning, that a statement is meaningful if it can be verified by sense experience.[60] But he wants to "modify the principle by allowing *use* as well as *verifiability* to be a criterion of meaning." The problem he sees of religious language is not whether a religious statement is true or false, "but how it could be known either to be true or to be false." The latter question is prior to the first. If the latter question cannot be answered, Braithwaite thinks, one cannot say that religious statement has any ascertainable meaning; and consequently, one cannot ask someone to believe what he does not understand. And to know the meaning of religious assertion is to know the sort of situation in which it can be true or false.

Following the line of thought that logical positivism has taken, Braithwaite recognizes three types of meaningful utterances:

> the statement about particular matter of empirical facts,
> the scientific hypothesis,
> the really necessary statements of logic and mathematics.[61]

Most contemporary thinkers seem to believe that religious utterances do not belong to any of these three groups, and he grants that there is no *prima facie* objection to interpreting them as scientific hypotheses. However, if religious utterances are to be interpreted as scientific hypoth-

[60] R. B. Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955). Reprinted in Ian T. Ramsey, ed., *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy* (London: SCM, 1966), pp. 53-73. Quotations are taken from this reprint.

[61] Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 55.

eses they must be refutable by sense experience;[62] That is, we must be willing to abandon them if facts prove different from what we think they are. Braithwaite points out that in earlier stages of Christian history talk about God has undoubtedly been treated as a scientific hypothesis subject to empirical test.[63] But in Christian theology the existence of God is seldom treated as an empirical hypothesis which can be tested by experience. Unless a believer is willing to grant this, however, Braithwaite thinks it is hard to see how one can treat religious beliefs as scientific hypotheses.[64]

Religious utterances cannot be said to resemble the propositions of mathematics and logic either. The necessary propositions of mathematics and logic as we can learn from Hume and Kant tell us nothing of the real world. Such propositions are tautological and, therefore, uninformative. But the language of God claims to be informative. Religious utterances cannot, therefore, be said to resemble the propositions of mathematics and logic.

Religious utterances cannot be said to fall into any of the three classes of meaningful statements. Does this mean that religious utterances are nonsensical? "The earlier Positivists thought so."[65] But

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[62]Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 56.

[63]Cf. 1 King 18:17-40.

[64]Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 57.

[65]Ibid., p. 56.

Braithwaite does not think so. Religious utterances are not the only statements which are unverifiable by sense experience. Moral statements have the same peculiarity. But logical positivists are not willing to admit that moral statements are nonsense. "For moral statements have a use in guiding conduct: and if they have a use they surely have meaning," says Braithwaite.

Thus Braithwaite modifies the verification theory of meaning, giving a room for a *use* theory. He defines the meaning of any statement as being given by the way in which it is used; "the meaning of any statement, then, will be taken as being given by the way it is used."[66] The problem of religious language as Braithwaite now sees it is to explain in empirical terms how religious assertion is used by a man who asserts it in order to express his religious conviction.

Braithwaite believes that the primary element in the use of religious language is that religious assertions are used as moral assertions.[67] According to Braithwaite moral assertions are not descriptive; they make no factual claim; neither do they express the mere feelings of the speaker; they are used to express an attitude of the man who makes the assertion. It is not used to assert the proposition that he has an attitude; it is used to show forth or evince that attitude. Braithwaite rejects the idea that moral assertion is the feeling of approval or disapproval of certain

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[66]Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 59.

[67]Ibid.

actions done (an emotive theory), because no "emotion of feeling approval is fundamental to the use of moral assertion"; he advocates, what he considers to be primary, the speaker's "intention to perform the action when the occasion for it arises" (hence conative theory).[68] In other words, it is not the feeling but the intention to follow a certain policy of life, which is the primary element in the use of moral assertion.

What light does this interpretation throw on the question of religious language? If one explains religious utterances in terms of the older emotive theory of meaning, the primary function of the use of religious utterances is evincing religious feelings. The assertion, for example, that God is our heavenly father will be taken to express the asserter's feeling secure in the same way as he would feel secure in his father's presence.[69] However, as Braithwaite points out:

> only few religious men would be prepared to admit that their religion was a matter of merely feeling: feelings--of joy, of consolation, of being at one with the universe--but to evince such feelings is certainly not the primary use of their religious assertions.[70]

Braithwaite believes that if one has to interpret religious utterances as expressions of moral assertions--as "being primarily declaration of adherence to a policy of action, declarations of commitment to a way of life," such a criticism is unaffected. Thus he states his position:

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[68] Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 60.

[69] Ibid., p. 61. [70] Ibid.

> The view which I put forward for your consideration is that the intention of a Christian to follow a Christian way of life is not only the criterion for the sincerity of his belief in the assertion of Christianity; it is the criterion for the meaningfulness of his assertion. Just as the meaning of moral assertion is given by its use in expressing the asserter's intention to act--in accordance with the moral principle involved, so the meaning of a religious assertion is given by its use in expressing the asserter's intention to follow a specified policy in behaviour...it is the intention to behave which constitutes what is known as religious conviction.[71]

Now if a religious assertion is the declaration of an intention to follow a certain policy, what policy does it declare? If a religious assertion is regarded as representative of a larger number of assertions of the same religious system, then, the particular one a man is making can be taken as a representative specimen of a particular way of life. Thus an assertion "God is love" in Braithwaite's interpretation means a declaration of an utterer's intention "to follow an agapeistic way of life."[72]

We may also note that, although Braithwaite interprets religious utterances as moral assertions, he does not say that religious utterances are the same as moral assertions. There are differences between religious and moral assertions: unlike moral assertions, isolated religious assertions do not specify by themselves the utterer's intention for his future behaviour. Moreover, religious assertions are concerned with both external as well as internal dimension. Thus conversion is not only of the will but also of the heart; and the agapeistic way of life includes not

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[71]Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, pp. 61-62.

[72]Ibid., p. 64.

only behaving in an outwardly loving way, it also includes an agapeistic frame of mind.[73] Also religious assertions have a propositional element which is lacking in purely moral assertions; religion has an additional feature which distinguishes it from morality; the believer associates his intentions with a particular religious story.[74]

The word "story" has for Braithwaite a wide range of meanings, including "myth," "folklore," "legend" in the ordinary use of these terms.[75] Braithwaite points out that the stories are narrated in straight-forwardly empirical terms, which can be tested by ordinary experiential methods. These stories are thought of by the religious man in connection with his resolution to follow the way of life advocated by his religion. It is not necessary, according to Braithwaite, for the religious man to believe in the truth of the story associated with his religion; what is necessary is that the story "should be entertained in thought." For the import of religious stories is both psychological and causal.[76]

Braithwaite's account of religious language has been received with great enthusiasm. "Braithwaite's theory of how religious language works is a brilliant piece of work, as remarkable for its brevity as for its clarity," say McClendon and Smith.[77] Without any doubt his theory, van Buren points out, "does indeed account for the moral aspect of Christian-

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[73]Braithwaite, *An Empiricist's View of the Nature of Religious Belief*, p. 65.

[74]Ibid., p. 66. [75]Ibid., p. 68. [76]Ibid., p. 69.

[77]McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 27.

ity and does justice to the fact that religious conversion has always been thought of as a conversion of the will and as the beginning of a new way of life."[78] It also goes to his credit that a believer's being a Christian is often judged not only by his intention to follow Christian teaching, but by his actually living it out. Thus the practical aspect of Christianity has been very well encompassed. For these reasons some have felt that "it may be difficult to come up with another theory of religion which is compatible with the principle of empiricism."[79]

It may be so. But as I see it, Braithwaite's theory of religious language from the view point of "intention to follow an agapeistic way of life" is far from satisfactory.

One of the difficulties in his interpretation is this: if "God is love" claims nothing more than a speaker's intention to live a life showing love and concern towards others, if "God is love" says nothing about God's qualities or attributes, then there is no ontological ground for a religious discourse. But this would rob a believer of what he is trying to say. Thus on Braithwaite's view of the function of religious language, a believer can only give autobiographical testimonies of his feelings, intentions, desires, his ways of seeing and understanding the world and life. However, a believer wants to claim that there is something *more* besides. Whether a believer is successful or not in his attempt to explain his meaning in any intelligible term is of course a different matter.

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[78] van Buren, *The Edges of Language*, p. 35.

[79] Blackstone, *The Problem of Religous Language*, p. 97.

Moreover, in Christian tradition, God is not only a loving God; besides being a loving and merciful God, he is also a jealous God. If we extend Braithwaite's analysis to the negative attributes of God, such as "jealous," "angry," "impassible," "immutable," etc. we are faced with immense difficulties. Some of the consequences of such analysis would even become "counter-Christian" as McClendon and Smith point out.[80]

Consider further: "God is love" means that a speaker intends to love and live accordingly. But living a life showing love and concern towards other people is not *necessarily* a Christian doctrine. It is not clear to me how we should proceed to interpret (on Braithwaite's theory) those specifically Christian doctrines, whether in the form of Christian theology or of historical statements as "We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," or "Jesus rose from the dead."

The difficulties do not end here. The interpretation of religious utterances from the perspective of a "declaration of adherence to a policy of action, declaration of commitment to a way of life" faces another problem. As Passmore says:

> Suppose a man announces that he intends to adopt a wholeheartedly acquisitive policy, allowing no emotion to enter into his life except avarice, and suppose he finds that he is able to carry out his policy more effectively if he constantly keeps before his mind the lives of high class criminals. Then on Braithwaite's definiton, we should have to describe him as a thoroughly religious man... If Braithwaite's account of religion is the best a Christian positivist can make of it [Passmore continues] I cannot think that religion will

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[80] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 28.

> take much comfort, and the secularist will certainly object that this is not the religion he meets and contends with in his daily life.[81]

Finally, the crux of the contemporary challenge of philosophy to religion is not whether religious language has *any* meaning, but rather, whether religious language is *cognitively* meaningful. In order that a religious utterance be cognitively meaningful, there must be a relevant situation to confirm or disconfirm a particular religious claim associated with a particular belief. However, the non-cognitivist theory of religious language as advanced either by Braithwaite or Hare does not have anything to offer in answer to the challenge. This is so because if we are to be able to determine whether certain facts or empirical data are relevant in confirming or disconfirming a given set of religious claims, we must recognize that in some sense religious utterances are factual claims, or in some sense they are literal claims

In what sense religious utterances are factual or literal claims, and in what sense religious utterances are cognitively meaningful? are questions yet to be answered.

Cognitivist Theory of Religious Language

A cognitivist theory (or a descriptive theory as it is sometimes called) of religious language agrees that religious utterances are assertions in some important sense and that they can be true or false; that

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[81] J. A. Passmore, "Christianity and Positivism" in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 35, 1957, p. 133.

they are verifiable or falsifiable in principle; and that certain occurences in the world can be taken as evidence either to confirm or disconfirm a religious claim. The philosophers who maintain this sort of position, while differing in details, do not try to "shift" the ground from the contemporary challenge. They believe that religion can adequately be defended on the critic's own ground. Two philosophers whom I propose considering are Ian T. Ramsey and John Hick.

Ian T. Ramsey

The late Ian T. Ramsey was one of the pioneers to produce a major work to meet the contemporary challenge of philosophy to religion. His published work in the field is extensive, his thoughts are scattered, and "Ramsey never finished drawing together his mature systematic thought on this and other related topics."[82] So I have chosen three themes which I consider Ramsey's major concerns: his analysis of ordinary situations in terms of discovery-discernment leading to commitment; his analysis of religious situations in terms of cosmic disclosure leading to commitment; and finally, his attempt to interpret problematic religious phrases in terms of models and qualifiers.[83]

An Ordinary Situation: Discernment and Commitment

Ramsey begins his analysis of religious language by examining ordinary situations. Recognizing that "the contemporary philosophical interest

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[82] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions*, p. 35.

[83] Ramsey's most important published works for our study are: *Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1957). *Christian Discourse: Some Logical Exploration* (London: OUP, 1965) *Models and Mystery* (London: OUP, 1964). "The Challenge of Contemporary Philosophy to Christianity" in *Modern Churchman* 42, 1952, pp. 252-69.

in language, far from being soul-destroying, can be so developed as to provide a novel inroad into the problems and controversies of theology,"[84] he develops a program to place religious utterances in an empirical setting, making religious utterances compatible with the principle of empiricism. Ramsey acknowledges the "logical oddity" of religious language and asks "How do we face the challenge?" He proceeds by asking another question, "...a leading question: To what kind of situation does religion appeal? What kind of empirical anchorage have theological words?"[85]

As Ramsey sees it, in any ordinary disclosure situation what takes place goes beyond the empirical data which constitute the situation. That is, what is disclosed is not restricted to observable empirical facts. Ramsey offers many examples to show that a disclosure situation is not restricted to empirical data. One of such examples is taken from a court room scene:

> Let us recall the setting of High Court--all very impersonal, all very formal, quite lacking in "depth" and "vision." The name of the judge is made as suitably abstract as possible--Mr. Justice Brown... Nor is the argument of the court interested in persons. We have, instead, "the crown," "the accused" and "the prosecution." Here is a situation as impersonal as may be; a *facade* of human existence. Then, one morning, Mr. Justice Brown enters the court to see as "the accused" the closest friend of his undergraduate days..."eye meets eye"; astonishment; an odd word is uttered..."Sammy!"...the result is that the court is "electrified." An impersonal situation has "come alive." Mr. Justice Brown has seen in the "accused" something he has never seen before...and the accused has seen in the judge...something which scarlet and

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[84] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 11.

[85] Ibid., p. 15.

> ermine did not express, something which goes far beyond the wigs and the legal language... At any rate my point is that such words would be violent contrast to the language used normally in the setting of the High Court, and this violent contrast makes the point (or so I hope) that a characteristically personal situation cannot be contained in any "impersonal" object language. The situation is more than "What's seen", it has taken on "depth"; there is something akin to religious insight, "discernment," "vision."[86]

Ramsey produces many other examples to illustrate similar situations where there is discernment of "depth" and "vision" which goes beyond the observable facts by the senses. He uses a wide range of ordinary situations to illustrate disclosure situation which he describes in such metaphors as "coming alive," "light dawning," "ice breaking" and "penny dropping" etc.[87] The ordinary situation also can take a turn to a disclosure situation by the simple use of certain words, names, or jokes, or due to the unexpected happening as in the case of a dinner party when someone's dinner jacket splits unexpectedly.

But the ordinary disclosure situation does not only evoke "discernment," it also leads to "total commitment." Here again Ramsey directs us to common situations where people sometimes do things unexpectedly, exercising free will in contrast with being told to or ordered. They do it because they chose to do it.

Ramsey's two stories will illustrate the point under consideration. Here is a man who does not know how to swim very well. As he walks along the river bank, he sees a child at a distance, struggling, almost drowning. He jumps into the river to rescue the child, risking his own life.

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[86]Ramsey, *Religious Language*, pp. 20-22.

[87]Ibid., pp. 20ff.

Here is another situation. Someone is rock-climbing with a friend; suddenly his friend slips and falls to a ledge hundreds of feet below. The climber tries to rescue his friend, endangering his own life. But why do these men act in this way, risking their own lives? It is certainly not because they were told to, or ordered, but because they have this "sense of duty" or the sense of "commitment."[88]

Ramsey goes on to illustrate how "commitment" can be seen in various human activities like loyalty to a school, to a college, to a community and to a nation; in leisure activities like cricket and football; or in one's personal career like being the captain of a ship, or in personal relationship like falling in love. Ramsey is endlessly resourceful in showing how commitment is being involved in almost every aspect of human activity.[89]

Religious Situation: Cosmic Disclosure and Total Commitment

An analysis of the ordinary disclosure situations, Ramsey believes, throws some light on specifically religious situations. In religious situations language has "depth," and it becomes characteristically personal in violent contrast to "impersonal," "observational," or "object" language. A religious situation is one in which one can appropriately speak of "being gripped," or of "being totally overcome."[90] It is the response to something from outside us. That is, a religious situation is one in which

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[88] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 18.

[89] Ibid., pp. 28-48. [90] Ibid., pp. 22f.

a discernment is made followed by a total commitment. According to Ramsey, a commitment without discernment is bigotry and idolatry; and a discernment without commitment is the worst of all religious vices; it is insincerity and hypocrisy.[91] The religious situation is, then, analogous to the innumerable situations we have described above where discernment and commitment are involved; and religious language is analogous to language used in such situations.

Ramsey has a great deal to say on religious commitment. Just as religious discernment can be seen in any ordinary disclosure situations, religious commitment can be seen in any commitment situations we have looked at. However, Ramsey wants to say that religious commitment is more than the ordinary commitment we saw in various human activities.

> Religious commitment, I suggest, partakes of both. It combines the total commitment to a pastime, to a ship, to a person, with the breadth of mathematical commitment. It combines the "depth" of personal or quasi-personal loyalty--to a sport, a boat, a loved one... So, we see religious commitment as a total commitment to the whole universe.[92]

Part of Ramsey's total scheme in interpreting religious language now becomes clear. We know that stories are told, scenes enacted, in the hope that the penny will drop, the ice will break, the light will dawn, and the appropriate response be made and commitment follow. With this in mind, if we look at Ramsey's analysis of "God is love" we see:

> We should have to tell a story of human devotion until a characteristically religious situation was evoked. We should have to

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[91] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 18.

[92] Ibid., pp. 35-37.

> tell the stories of the "lives of good men" until a point was reached where we did not merely admire the "goodness" or try to express it in some precept, but where when the characteristic "discernment" was evoked, we responded with total commitment: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all." It would be in relation to such a situation that the religious man would then posit the word "God" or the word "Love." To say that God is love is thus to claim that the word "God" can be given in relation to a total commitment...which can be approached by considering those partial commitments which we morally describe in terms of the word Love.[93]

Models and Qualifiers

Ramsey finds the traditional "attributes" of God puzzling to grasp conceptually and apparently without any exception. The attributes of negative theology such as "immutable", "impassible", the characterization of God by "unity", "simplicity", "perfection"; the description of God as "First Cause", "Almighty", or "Infinitely Wise"; and references to God's "Eternal Purpose" and to "Creation *ex nihilo*" when taken descriptively, Ramsey finds very puzzling. Take, for example, "first cause." The term "cause" when interpreted descriptively can only be construed as self-contradictory. This oddurs to him, because the term "cause" always carries the existence of a causal predecessor, but a "first" cause denies such a predecessor. However, Ramsey claims that such a paradox occurs only when we try to understand "first cause" descriptively. Theological formulae like these are to be regarded as models, qualified in some way so as to produce a disclosure of cosmic significance, and not to be mistaken for straightforward assertions about a supernatural being. In

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[93]Ramsey, *Religious Language*, pp. 46-47.

other words, a term like "first cause" is not a descriptive phrase but an evocative qualified model.[94]

A "model" is any kind of picture or example on which people can agree and by which they can be led to understand something of which at present they are not certain.[95] Models in religious language are "disclosure models." These disclosure models function by displaying some structure similar to the perceived situation. The structural similarity between disclosure models and perceived situations leads to a disclosure or awareness of some kind which goes "beyond" what is seen.

> Somehow, the capacity of the model to "chime in with", "echo", and "hint at" a perceived situation creates an intuition of some elusive "object" that is given and yet not directly perceived. This elusive object also "echoes" and "chimes in with" the disclosure model.[96]

Ramsey further elucidates how the disclosure model is related to the perceived situation by comparing it with Black's concept of "analogue model."[97] Black's analogue model shows a point-by-point correspondence between the relationship it embodies and those embodied in the original. Ramsey's disclosure model does not show this point-by-point correspondence between relations in the model and the original. It appears to me what Ramsey wants to say is that it is the very similarity with a difference which

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[94] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 50.

[95] Cynthia Cohen, "The Logic of Religious Language" in *Religious Studies* 9, 1973, p. 144.

[96] Ibid., p. 145.

[97] cf. Max Black, *Models and Metaphors*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962, pp. 222f.

he finds in the relationship between the model and the original that evokes the disclosure situation.

If we go back to Ramsey's analysis of such phrases as "first cause" we can see how a disclosure situation arises from a qualified model. The disclosure model "cause" directs us to some particular thing/situation in a causal setting; we may think of a tree in relation to an acorn, or a human being in relation to his ancestors and successors. The model is a general term which can be "filled in" by any familiar situation or stories of our choice.[98]

Then we have the next word, "first", the qualifier. Qualifiers are terms which serve as directions for the construction of detailed model pictures.[99] They describe nothing by themselves but serve only as "cue-phrases" which help us to develop a particular model situation in a given direction until at some point, the penny drops, the ice breaks, and the hearer begins to see the point. Further, the qualifier compels us to trace causal development of the particular model picture further and further backwards. For example, according to Ramsey, when we think of coal, we do not think of fire but of the pre-historic forest; when we think of human beings we do not think of the future generation but of the ancestors.[100] Thus, to Ramsey, the qualifier "first" impels us to look backwards and backwards, and we have to continue the story building up a

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[98] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 61.

[99] Ibid., p. 62.

[100] Ibid.

pattern of terms and relations until a characteristically different situation is evoked, a situation which satisfies; that is, until "there breaks in on us 'a sense of the unseen.'"

Consider again the phrase "infinitely wise." Taken descriptively this phrase is also puzzling, because in the case of the wise man we know (however wise he is) "it is always possible to think of a greater wisdom or a person even wiser than that."[101] So given a descriptive interpretation, it does not seem possible to attribute to any man or being the maximum degree of wisdom. Therefore, Ramsey thinks that the phrase "infinitely wise" is not a descriptive phrase but an evocative qualified model.

Thus the term "wise" names a disclosure model which is to be developed by the qualifier, "infinitely." The qualifier leads us to posit a chain of wisdom phrases which are qualified in increasing scale without end. Thus we may begin with a student who is scarcely wise, then go on to a "rather wise" one, a "very wise" one, an "extremely wise" one and on... and on...and on...until at some point a penny drops and a disclosure is made.[102]

We may also briefly mention his interpretation of what he calls "negative theology", such attributes as "immutable", "impassible" and the talk about God in terms of "unity", "simplicity" and "perfection." In the cases of "immutable" and "impassible", the disclosure models are

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[101] Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 66.

[102] Ibid.,

"mutable" and "passible" and the qualifier "is hardly more than an operator (i.e., *im-*), which develops and evokes the characteristic situation from the characteristic situation from the basis of a particular model, for example, mutability and passibility."[103] In the second group (the characterization of God in terms of "unity", "simplicity", "perfection", etc.) the approach to understand the term we have difficulty in understanding, is called "the method of contrast."[104] Thus, if we have difficulty in understanding the term, "unity", we have, according to this technique, to approach the idea of diversity--the many. There are many rooms but one house; there are many houses but one village; there are many villages but one country and on, and we have to continue on this line until at some point a characteristically different situation is evoked, that is, until at some point the penny drops and the light dawns.

In passing, it should be noted that in the method of contrast, "the method of contrast" itself functions as a qualifier to develop the disclosure situation.

Although what has been said does not cover the complexity of Ramsey's thought and his total program, nevertheless, I believe, it has covered sufficiently the core of Ramsey's theory of the nature and functions of of religious language, his method, and the sort of answer he is trying to give to meet the contemporary challenge of philosophy to religion.

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[103]Ramsey, *Religious Language*, p. 53.

[104]Ibid., p. 54.

There is, however, another aspect of Ramsey's theory of religious language which is not covered in my account: it is the concept of the "elusiveness of 'I'"[105] which some recent writers like Terrence Tilley take to be the key concept for understanding Ramsey's thought as a whole.[106] In Tilley's analysis of Ramsey's thought for example, understanding the question "Who am I?" by the use of "models" and "metaphors", one can be led to understand the talk of God.

> How do I understand who I am? On Ramsey's terms, I must use models (e.g., husband, father, teacher, philosopher) and theories (e.g., models of humans as constituted by chemicals, influenced by stimuli, etc.) to understand clearly that intuition of who I am. How do I understand who God is? I must use models and talk derived from models to explain to myself and to others the notion of what I have met in a cosmic-disclosure situation, Just as my self-understanding can change, so can my understanding of God change. Just as I may be (but am convinced that I am not) wrong about myself, so I may be (but am convinced that I am not) wrong about God. Just as my appreciation of what my activity entails may change, so my appreciation of what God's activity is and entails may change. Just as I realize who I am by understanding how I act, so can I realize who God is by acknowledging his mighty acts. The formal similarity of talk of God to talk of I means that we can be as sure of what or who God is as we can be sure of what or who I am.[107]

If we have correctly understood the problem of religious language and stated it as the critics have perceived it, there are several ways of approaching to meet the challenge. One way of demonstrating that re-

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[105]Ian T. Ramsey, "The Systematic Elusiveness of 'I'" in *Philosophical Quarterly* 5, 1955, pp. 193-204.

[106]Terrence W. Tilley, "On Being Tentative in Theology: The Thought of Ian T. Ramsey." Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 1976. Ibid., *Talking of God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

[107]Tilley, *Talking of God*, p. 88.

ligious utterances are cognitively meaningful is to show that religious utterances function in the same way as does an ordinary language. Another way of attempting to answer the problem is to acknowledge that religious utterances are in some important sense "assertions" that certain empirical data are relevant either to confirm or disconfirm religious claims. Ramsey's position is not straightforwardly along this line. However, since his major concern is to show that religious utterances have empirical anchorage, his theory is compatible with this interpretation.

If this is a permissible understanding, the question is "Has Ramsey met the conditions demanded by the critics for the cognitively meaningful use of language?" Has he successfully established that religious utterances have empirical anchorage? Many of Ramsey's critics do not think that he did. Of course, Ramsey constantly speaks as though he intends the "disclosure of depth" to be taken as having an objective content of divine origin. But there are several difficulties in this. One of the difficulties arises from his attempt to treat what he calls "disclosure situation" as providing "empirical anchorage" for religious claims. While experiences described in metaphors like "the light dawning," "the penny dropping," "the ice breaking" may be of considerable psychological interest as Donovan points out:

> It is obvious that the mere occurrence of some disclosure-like experience is in itself no clear guide to the actual discernment of anything. A genuine discovery of information or achievement of insight may or may not be accompanied by any sudden sense of illumination or disclosure. It is easy for us to think that

> the light has dawned, and yet to go on and show that we have got the thing completely wrong.[108]

In other words, Ramsey might have succeeded in emphasizing his view but he has not succeeded in advancing to defend it. It is not enough to say that "disclosure-situation" is "subject-object in structure" because so are "illusory" (or hallucinatory) experiences like seeing a "pink-rat" or a "snake-rob." Such experiences can have a subject-object structure of some sort.[109]

The other difficulty in Ramsey's interpretation is this. He sees that a main function of religious discourse is to evoke a religious disclosure situation. In order to achieve it, stories are told, scenes are enacted, in the hope that the penny will drop, the ice will break, and the situation will come alive, that an appropriate response be made and commitment follow. But one asks, "What if the penny never drops, and the ice never breaks?" Not everyone seems to take this question seriously, and they seem content to say that "Religious language runs the risk of failure, but perhaps no more than does all language."[110] But the "risk of failure" appears to be far more serious than a hearer's failure to grasp the meaning of what is said to him. This is because Ramsey's theory of religious language is built upon the concept of a "disclosure situation" which leads to total response and commitment.

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[108] Peter Donovan, *Religious Language* (London: SCM, 1976), p. 34.

[109] Cf. F. Ferre, *Language, Logic and God* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1962), p. 141.

[110] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 141.

Moreover, Ramsey seems to be touching here one of the most important problems, which Penelhum calls "epistemological deadlock." Penelhum suggests in such a situation a believer can only continue to proclaim his beliefs, as Penelhum expresses it, "in the hope that, as he sees the matter, the other sceptic will one day come to see their real significance and accept that to which they point: he must, in simple words, continue to preach!"[111] Now, if this is all that we can do, there appears to be something wrong with the theory.

Part of the problem seems to lie in Ramsey's conception of what is involved in the definition of terms, or the meaning of "descriptive language." He seems to have misconstrued the meaning of much of our use of ordinary language which should be the common basis for any meaningful communication between people. This is why Ramsey's evocative theory of religious language has failed to provide a meeting place.

Consider, for example, Ramsey's contention that it is futile to define terms like "perfect", or "perfection", since any illustration of it will be found deficient. So he suggests that we use "the method of contrast." Using this technique, we begin with examples of "imperfection" of a, b, c and d on a sliding scale. As we progress, at each stage we will have less and less of "im-" and more and more of "perfection." But this seems to misunderstand the ordinary use of the word "perfect" and "perfection."

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[111] Terence Penelhum, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 107.

Suppose someone went to a tailor to get his second-hand suit fitted. He wants it done "perfect." On Ramsey's technique, as the tailor started taking off a little here and a little there, the suit gets less and less "im-" and more and more "perfection." But at what point will the tailor be able to reach perfection? At what point will he be able to get rid of the "im-" completely? It will not do to insist that at some point he must reach perfection, because although the tailor thinks that he has reached perfection, it may be that the "im-" still lingers. So he could take off one tenth, one hundredth, maybe one thousandth...of an inch from the waist, or from the hip perhaps! This seems to suggest that Ramsey is confused about the ordinary use of the term like "perfect" or "perfection." The confusion seems to have arisen from his failure to accomodate a distinction between logical and epistemological functions of terms like "perfect." In ordinary usage, we say, "This is perfect," after having tried on a trouser or a shirt. This does not mean that the "ims" have been removed *completely* (logically completely) but rather, other things being considered, that when the waist size, the hip size, the length, etc. are satisfactory enough to justify the use of the term "perfect," then in that context the word is not misused.

Again consider why it is that Ramsey thinks that the term "first cause" involves self-contradiction. A cause can be considered as that which produces something and that in terms of which of what is produced is explained. Thus you drop a piece of chalk, and it breaks; so that the "breaking" of the piece of chalk is explained in terms of its being

dropped. However, Ramsey thinks that the notion of causality is self-reflective. This is where he goes wrong: because to insist that the notion of causality is self-reflective is to slip the concept of causality into the very definition of cause. Indeed, whether every cause is itself caused is a different question altogether, which has nothing to do with the meaning of the term "cause."

Ramsey's confusion of what is involved in the definition of such terms seems to have some general implication for his theory of religions language. The confusion springs, I suspect, from the uncritical, tacit acceptance of the positivist's frame of thinking. In my understanding, this seems to be the basic problem with the cognitivist theory of religious language. The proponents of this theory have failed to provide any clear theory of meaning and the criterion for knowledge of their own. This seems to be the fundamental weakness of the theory.

John Hick

John Hick believes that the central theistic affirmations such as divine existence in the biblical writings are to be taken as matters of objective fact, and such statements are to be taken as empirically verifiable. Thus according to Hick, the central theistic affirmations are assertions in the true sense, and they are cognitively meaningful.[112]

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[112] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973). *Faith and Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1967). *Death and Eternal Life* (London: Collins, 1976). "Theology and Verification" in *Theology Today* 17, 1960, pp. 12-31. Reprinted in R. E. Santoni, ed., *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (London: Indiana University Press, 1968). Quotations are taken from this reprint.

Hick recognizes that the central intellectual perplexity for the contemporary theists is not the difficulty of proving that God exists, but the difficulty of establishing their intelligibility, and he wants to refute the claims that religious utterances have uses which are merely mythical, quasi-moral, ceremonial, emotive, ideological or a pciture-preference.[113] He argues that the central theistic affirmations are used to make factual claims, and such sentences as "God exists" are used to make assertions. Therefore, according to Hick, central theistic claims have anchorage in the real world, they are true or false.[114]

Now, if Hick could demonstrate, not only that the user of religious language *intends* that his talk about God is assertion, but it *is* assertion, then he would successfully meet the challenge of contemporary philosophy to religion. However, as it can be seen later, I am not convinced that Hick has succeeded in establishing that the central theistic affirmations are verifiable in principle.

In order to show that the central theistic affirmations are true or false, Hick puts forward the concept of "eschatological verification," which will be our main concern in studying his position. This does not cover Hick's other concerns, but given the relevance of the thesis it is the most important issue.

By "verification" Hick does not mean what and where to look on the supposition that what is claimed is true. By "verification" he means

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[113]Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 24.

[114]Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 361.

"the removal of ignorance or uncertainty concerning the truth of some propositions." Thus "That p is verified (whether p embodies a theory, hypothesis, prediction, or straightforward assertion) means that something happens which makes it clear that p is true."[115] The conception of verification suggested by Hick is then "both logical and psychological;"[116] It is never purely logical to Hick. That p is verified means that someone has verified p, often with the implication that a report to this effect is generally acdepted. Hick argues that if this is acceptable, it is impossible to verify p without someone having verified it. Verification is the name of an event which takes place in human consciousness. It refers to human experience.

Verification presupposes "prediction." The notion of prediction is central to Hick's understanding of verification. But predictive propositions are often conditional. The proposition "It will rain tomorrow" may be predictive. It means that if you conduct such an experiment you will obtain such a result; in this case, if you are still alive tomorrow, you may have a visual experience of what is called "raining," and the proposition, "It will rain tomorrow," is verified. Ordinarily it is assumed that verification and falsification are symetrically related to each other, like two sides of a coin, but Hick argues that they do not necessarily stand to one another as do the two sides of a coin so that once

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[115] Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 362.

[116] Ibid., p. 363.

the coin is spun it must fall one one side or the other. "There are white ravens in Africa" can be conclusively verified, but it cannot be falsified. That is, having failed to find one white raven in Africa does not falsify the statement. One may not find one now, but it does not mean that no one will ever find one.[117]

Although Hick claims that the divine existence is in principle verifiable, he does not claim that it will come in this life. The verification is "eschatological"; that is, one has to wait till one dies; it will come in the next life.[118] The verification need not come as a vision; it may be in the form of an experience of the fulfillment of God's purpose for ourselves as it has been given to us in Christian revelation, in conjunction with an experience of communion with God as he has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is worth noting that Hick's insistence that the verification must be eschatological allows him to come to terms with Wisdom's argument that the existence of God is not now an experimental issue.[119] However, Hick contends, in opposition to Wisdom, that a Christian believer does not merely have different feelings or attitudes about the world and a man's place in it. His understanding of life and his place in the world is not

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[117]Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 366.

[118]Ibid., p. 367.

[119]Cf. John Wisdom, "Gods" in *Proceedings of Aristotelian Society*, 1944-45. Reprinted in John Wisdom, *Philosophy and Psycho-Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

merely the same as the case where two people see the same objects in two different ways (e.g., the duck-rabbit seen either like a duck or a rabbit). A Christian's and an atheist's "opposed interpretations" about man's life and the nature of reality "are genuinely rival assertions."[120]

There is then, according to Hick, a real factual issue between a theist and an atheist; it is not a matter of alternative ways of seeing, looking at man's nature and destiny. Hick, however, does agree with Wisdom that in this life we are like men looking at an ambiguous figure.[121] We cannot now settle the issue between a theist and an atheist by an appeal to any experience. There are no signs that can unambiguously count as pointing to God; but "Christian doctrine postulates an ultimate unambiguous state of existence *in patria* as well as our present ambiguous existence *in via*."[122] But Hick makes it very clear that this postulated state of eternal life as well as the earthly pilgrimage cannot be appealed to as an ultimate evidence for theism. Hick also admits, if we overstress the imprecise state of our present understanding, that Wisdom's position is very compelling.

But, Hick argues, the imprecise state of our present understanding does not undermine the meaningful nature of the hypothesis, since according to Hick, we are able to conceive what it would be like to verify theism in the resurrection world. Thus while we cannot have any present

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[120]Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 369.

[121]Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, pp. 39ff.

[122]Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 178.

evidence for or against theism (we must now live by faith), yet we can understand what it would be like to have evidence in the next life; therefore, Hick argues, the theistic affirmations are assertions.

Hick's argument is valid, as he himself is aware, "only if the logically prior idea of continued personal existence after death is intelligible."[123] Of course, Hick does not probe deeply into the theological and philosophical problems of continued personal existence. He does, however, offer three arguments to support the view that the notion of continuing personal identity is logically possible.[124] He recognizes the oddity of the notion, but believes that it is logically possible. His arguments are as follows:

Picture I

> Suppose that at some learned gathering in this country one of the company were suddenly and inexplicably to disappear, and that at the same moment an exact replic of him were suddenly and inexplicably to appear at some comparable meeting in Australia. The person who appears in Australia is exactly similar, as to both bodily and mental characteristics, with memory, complete similarity of bodily features, including even finger prints, hair and eye coloration and stomach contents, and also of beliefs, habits, and mental propensities. In fact there is everything that would lead us to identify the one who appeared with the one who disappeared, except continuity of occupancy of space... I suggest that faced with all these circumstances his colleagues would soon...find themselves thinking of him and treating him as the individual who had so inexplicably disappeared from their midst.[125]

Hick argues, given such a situation, the postulated facts would demand and justify the extension of our normal use of the phrase "the same person."

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[123] Hick, "Theology and Verification, p. 370.

[124] Ibid., p. 371. Cf. *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 181-82.

[125] Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 371.

Picture II

> Now let us suppose that the event in America is not a sudden and inexplicable disappearance, and indeed not a disappearance at all; but a sudden death. Only at the moment when the individual dies, a replica of him as he was at the moment before his death, complete with memory up to that instant, appears in Australia. Even with the corpse on our hands, it would still, I suggest, be an extension of "same person" required and warranted by the postulated facts, to say that the same person who died has been miraculously recreated in Australia.[126]

This case would be considerably odder than the previous picture, because of the existence of the corpse in America contemporaneously with the existence of the living person in Australia; nevertheless, Hick believes, faced with these facts people who meet him will start thinking of him and treat him as the same person.

Picture III

> My third supposal is that the replica, complete with memory, etc., appears, not in Australia, but as resurrection replica in a different world altogether, a resurrection world inhabited by resurrected persons. People who have seen him while he was on earth and who now see him in the resurrected world will say that the same person has appeared in the resurrected world.[127]

Hick was rightly aware that the mere survival of death would not verify theism. The believer and the non-believer may find themselves in the resurrected world, but to their surprise they may not find God in the resurrected world. Therefore, the mere fact of survival would be insufficient to verify theism. The thing that needs to be shown is that survival entails that God exists.

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[126]Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 372.

[127]Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 373.

Here Hick appeals to one of the Biblical interpretations of the nature of God. God has a purpose for every man. The purpose of God for each man is experienced by the believer, which assures him beyond rational doubt of the reality of God. In other words, Hick is searching for a conceivable situation which points unambiguously to the existence of a loving God, and finds it in "an experience of God's purpose for ourselves as it has been disclosed in Christian revelation," and "in an experience of communion with God as he has revealed himself in the person of Christ."[128] Hick believes when these two experiences occur in conjunction with one another, we can know beyond rational doubt that God exists.

Given a well deserved credit for Hick's understanding that basic religious claims are factual assertions, one still wants to know "Does Hick make out a strong case for the intelligibility of such religious claims as required and demanded by the critics?" His theory will depend on how successfully he has argued for the personal self-identity, and how successfully he has argued that survival of death entails that God exists. Some critics are convinced that Hick has not succeeded in establishing either a personal self-identity or the entailment of God's existence.[129]

Undoubtedly, if eschatological verification were to make sense, it would not do to say, Wait, until we die!" and the something of a man that

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[128]Hick, "Theology and Verification," p. 373.

[129]Cf. Kai Nielsen, "Eschatological Verification" in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 9, 1963, pp. 271-81. Duff-Forbes, "Theology and Verification Again," pp. 152-54.

survives must be the same person. If John Baker is to survive death, it must be the *same* John Baker who survives death. If that which survives death turns out to be John Smith it will not do John Baker any good. Therefore, John Baker must survive death and not John Smith in his place. Hick does not argue how John Baker is going to survive death, or what John Baker's surviving death means. He rather asks, "What is the situation in which we would use the expression 'the same person' ordinarily?" He gives us three different situations as we have seen, in which he believes that the ordinary use of the phrase "the same person" could be extended without breaking any linguistic rules. But Hick's arguments are not conclusive as the following counter examples will show.

Case I

Let us suppose that one night John Baker (hereafter, JB) goes to bed. As he is getting up in the morning, two other persons appear from thin air, as it were, both resembling JB in bodily and mental characteristics, with continuity of memory, complete similarity of bodily features, including finger prints, etc. JB is dumbfounded; and after the confusion has died down, someone else comes into the room. He sees three "JBs" each identical with the other. Can he tell which one of them is the *real* JB? We would think that he will not be able to. But *one* of them must be the real JB, and perhaps, if any one were to watch the events during and after JB's sleep, he might be able to tell.

Case II

Now let us suppose that JB is asleep. This time John Smith (hereafter JS) is watching JB. Then suddenly JB disappears into thin air. JS is taken aback. Then out of thin air there appear two other persons absolutely identical with JB in bodily features, memory, beliefs, etc, What is JS to say? Heaven knows what he would say! (and for that matter what any one ever would say!). Would JS know which one is the real JB? It is obvious that JS has no means of knowing which one is the *real* JB.

Would JB himself know who was really him? It will only make sense to ask such a question if the presupposed notion that JB could somehow retain his personal self identity is granted, But that is the issue to be proved. Therefore, if the above cases carry any weight at all, they show that one cannot argue for personal self-identity, as Hick does, either from bodily or mental resemblances. To say that, if two persons are identical in all respects, in bodily features, mental beliefs, memories, etc., there are not two persons but one is not to answer the problem but to evade it. To say one is the copy of the other is no answer either, since we have no means of knowing which one is the original.

It appears to me then that Hick has failed to make out his case for personal identity which is so essential for the success of his theory. However, even if it were granted that Hick has successfully established personal self-identity, he has failed to show that personal survival entails the existence of God.[130]

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[130]For the defense of Hick's position, see B. Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 11f.

We note that Hick does not argue for what he takes to be the "Hellenistic notion of the survival of the disembodied soul" but for the "resurrection of the body" as understood in the Christian theology. The survival of a resurrection body in the resurrection world is a necessary condition, but not sufficient in itself. As Hick says, "For survival simply as such, would not serve to verify theism."[131] Therefore, the resurrection of the body must entail that God exists. Hick tries to argue this, if I understand him correctly, by calling attention to the fact that resurrection of the body is the gift of God. God lives, therefore we live is the simple logic. Were there no resurrection of the body, we could not falsify the fact that God exists; but were there such a resurrection, the existence of God would follow because God raised us from the dead.[132]

But the problem is that the resurrection of the body presupposes the existence of God. That is, the resurrection of the body is explained in terms of the reality of God, so that the existence of God is already presupposed. But the existence of God is under attack. The critics want to know how the talk about God is intelligible. It appears to me that Hick has failed to establish this crucial point. As Nielsen points out:

> But how is Hick's claim here even verifiable in principle without the assumption of God--a divine Creator? We are trying to come to understand how "There is a God" or "God created man" could have factual meaning, but Hick's analysis requires us to presuppose the very thing we are trying to understand, for to speak of "the proper destiny of human nature" or of "man's

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[131]Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 186.

[132]Ibid., p. 187.

> final self-fulfillment" assumes that man is a creature of God, an artifact created by God with a purpose--an "essential human nature" that can be realised. Without such an assumption, talk of man's proper destiny or final self-fulfillment is without sense. Hick is asking us to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, for unless we understand what it is for there to be a God who created man with a purpose we can make nothing at all [of the claim that divine existence, as understood in the New Testament, is a matter of objective fact].[133]

Perhaps it can be argued that Hick is not trying to prove conclusively that the survival of death entails that God exists. Rather, he is simply trying to establish the factual character of theistic affirmations. Thus eschatological verification is advanced as a means of establishing the factual nature of theistic beliefs in response to questions raised by contemporary philosophy. As he says:

> The task is not to show that religious statements are true, but to show that they make factual assertions, and are accordingly true or false. And it is this task that the notion of eschatological verification is invoked to perform... Thus the purpose of the reference to eschatological verification is simply to show the inquirer who is concerned about the questions raised by logical positivism and its philosophical descendants that the theistic assertion is indeed--whether true or false--a genuinely factual assertion.[134]

But the question still remains. If theistic affirmations are real assertions, then Hick has to show that certain empirical data are in some sense relevant, either to confirm or disconfirm theistic claims, as he accepts the view that "verifiability is a valid criterion of factual meaning,"[135] although, of course, by verification he means an exclusion of

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[133] Nielsen, "Eschatological Verification," p. 276.

[134] Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 195.

[135] Ibid., p. 169.

rational doubt regarding the truth of the proposition. But how can he remove the rational doubt? The nature of his argument makes it clear: by establishing that the theistic affirmations are true, not only for the believer "who has no need to confirm his faith," but for the non-believer. He fails, nevertheless, to establish his proposition; for he fails to show that that which survives death is the "same person," and he fails to show that surviving of death entails the existence of God. It is vitally important that he establish these two conditions for the success of his argument, and he fails at both the crucial points.

The Challenge to the Challenge

The critic's challenge, we say, demands that if religious utterances are cognitively meaningful (that is, if they are genuine assertions), any empirically determinable conditions or situations obtained would falsify or verify such theistic affirmations as "God loves us." We have been looking at two major reactions: (a) those who contend that the "challenge cannot be answered" because "religious utterances deny nothing and do not qualify as genuine assertions," and (b) those who contend that "the challenge can be answered," that religious utterances do deny something and they do qualify as factual assertions.

Some thinkers like Mavrodes and Kellenberger oppose these two major reactions. They think that there is a third alternative, namely, to "challenge the challenge."[136]

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[136] James Kellenberger, "The Falsification Challenge," in *Religious Studies* 5, 1969, pp. 69-76. G. I. Mavrodes, "God and Verification," in *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10, 1964, pp. 187-91.

The reasons for this stand are the following: that they think the critics have failed to state which version of the verification principle of meaning they are using; that the critic's challenge itself is conceptually muddled;[137] that the demand to produce "empirical denial" is unjustified; that the critics have at least failed to state their reason conclusively why a believer should be able to produce "empirical denial" for such religious utterances as "God loves us."[138]

Nielsen, for example, admits that he does not define "verification" but he insists that he has no need to since nearly everyone can understand the difference between such utterances as""Jesus is born in Bethlehem" and "Jesus is the Christ."[139] The former is a straight empirical statement, but the latter is not. But the reason for thinking that the challenge itself is muddled is not so much connected with a critic's failure to define which version of verification principle he is using, but that he has often failed to distinguish between the meaning of a statement and the method by which one verified the meaning. Mavrodes, for example, argues that the meaning of a statement and the method by which one verifies the statement, while closely related, are not the same.[140] He argues that one has to understand the meaning of a statement

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[137]Kallenberger, "The Falsification Challenge," p. 70.

[138]Mavrodes, "God and Verification," p, 187.

[139]Nielsen, "God and Verification Again," p. 135.

[140]Mavrodes, "God and Verification," p. 191.

before he proceeds to verify it. For example, in the statement "There are chairs in the next room," we must first understand its meaning before verifying it. If we do not understand the meaning of the statement, we cannot begin go go to the next room to discover its truth.[141]

In this way Mavrodes establishes that the meaning of a statement and the method by which one establishes that meaning are not identical. Thus according to Mavrodes to use verifiability as a criterion for a cognitively meaningful utterance itself involves the kind of incoherency or circularity with which the critics have charged the believers. The argument would have much greater force if the critics were to formulate an over-all criterion for meaning. But this is not what the critics have attempted. In fact, a critic like Nielsen frankly admits, as we have previously pointed out, that some utterances are cognitively meaningful even though they do not even purport to be verifiable. Since this is the case, Mavrodes does not have anything really significant to offer in answering the problem. Moreover, what appears to be the most unsatisfying is this: Mavrodes thinks that since the challenge itself is conceptually confused, "theologians as well as religious laymen" should not bother to respond to it "until philosophers have formulated it in some more coherent terms."[142] He says:

> I conclude, therefore, that theologians have no logical reason to be troubled by the current state of the philosophical challenge to the meaningfulness of God-talk. Perhaps at a later

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[141] Mavrodes, "God and Verification," p. 191.

[142] Ibid., p. 187.

> time some philosopher will formulate such a challenge in some coherent way. But until then theologians will probably be justified in devoting the major part of their attention to the more substantive problem of their discipline.[143]

But this appeal bears no consolation. Muddled or not, the challenge has been received well and it reflects a deep and genuine disquiet about the status of religious language. Therefore, it is no comfort to hear that we should not bother ourselves about the problem until it is more coherently formulated by the critics.

The Religious Language Game Theory

In recent years a vast amount of literature has appeared which has attempted a response to the contemporary challenge of philosophy to religion, based on the work of L. Wittgenstein, and in particular on his conception of language as a "language-game."[144] This view argues that there are many language-games and that each mode of discourse has its own logic or criteria for meaning. Since each mode of discourse has its own logic or criteria for meaning, it continues that the meaningfulness of each mode of discourse should be determined from *within* that discourse and not by imposing criteria from *outside*.

Religious discourse is one sort of discourse with a distinctive logic of its own; and, as such, the meaningfulness of religious beliefs or discourse is to be determined from within religion by its own accepted cri-

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[143] Mavrodes, "God and Verification," p. 191.

[144] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (London: Blackwell, 1957).

teria. Thus Hudson says:

> Religious belief can only be understood from within; and it is immune to charges of incoherence, unintelligibility, irrationality, or nonaccordance with objective reality, from outside, because, like any other universe of discourse, it sets its own definitive criteria of coherence, intelligibility, rationality and reality.[145]

Phillips argues that part of the contemporary philosophical confusion which accuses believers of not doing what they say they are doing, or of being conceptually confused, or of misusing language, arises from the failure to recognize that religious discourse has its own logic or criteria for meaning. The critics have preconceived ideas of what rationality, intelligibility, mean. For example, Phillips points out that the critics

> claim to detect a norm of meaningfulness which can test the validity of religious statements. The norm is "ordinary language." The view of religious concepts as "stretched meaning" or "eroded meaning" is based on a fundamental assumption, namely, that there is a primary context of "ordinary" use which can self-evidently be taken as paradigmatic for evaluating use of other contexts.[146]

Phillips argues that the distinction between intelligibility and unintelligibility, rationality and irrationality does not come to the same thing in every context. To think that it does is to fall into deep confusion about the relation between language and reality. He quotes from Winch to support this view:

> Reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has.

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[145] W. D. Hudson, "On Two Points against Wittgensteinian Fideism" in *Philosophy* 43, 1968, p. 269.

[146] D. Z. Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 6-7.

> Further, both the distinction between the real and the unreal and the concept of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language.[147]

Phillips comments thus:

> One can say within any such context, whether it be science or religion, "This is the rule which must be observed, this is the meaning which a word must have if it is to belong to this conceptual family." But when philosophers say, "This is the meaning which a word must have" without specifying any context, they are guilty of arbitrary linguistic legislation. The "must" is not a logical "must", but simply the "must" of their own preferences, or the "must" of one context which they have elevated...to be a standard for all others.[148]

It is clear then, according to Phillips, that it is a mistake to impose arbitrary linguistic legislation. Religion is a form of life which develops its own distinctive language-games, and religious utterances like the moves in the game are context-dependent. The uniqueness of religious language-games is a consequence of the kind of divine reality upon which it is built. Accordingly, just as in most games, certain terms, ideas, concepts have meaning because of the special part they play within the game, in the same way religious terms, concepts, ideas have their meaning because of the specific role they play in the life of the community. Thus when some questions about religious activities, ideas, concepts are asked outside their proper context (in which they have their meaning), they no longer have that clear meaning.

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[147] Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," p. 309.

[148] Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 10. Cf. *Faith and Philosophical Inquiry*, pp. 87f.

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Take, for example, a prayer as "talking to God." A believer says when he prays, he talks to God; or at least that he believes that he is talking to God. The critics reply, if prayer is talking to God, God must exist, otherwise prayer cannot be talking to God; it may be that one is talking to oneself, but if God does not exist, it cannot be talking to God. Phillips argues that the critics are not playing the same game.[149] If two economists disagree about a company's profit, or if two scientists disagree about the distance of the sun from the earth, or whether handling a ball is a foul or not, they are all playing the same game, and their differences are about certain facts; they are one in logic. Their differences can be settled by an appeal to the same criteria.

But the disagreement about whether a prayer can be "talking to God" if there is no God to talk to cannot be settled by an appeal to common criteria. As a matter of fact, there are no common criteria that can be appealed to, since the critics are not playing the same game. The critic's position is a confused one according to Phillips. He argues, whether a prayer is talking to God is a religious question

> which would be decided by referring to the criteria of prayer operative in the religious community... It is not the task of philosophy to settle the religious question of whether a man is talking to God or not.[150]

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[149] Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, pp. 41ff.

[150] Ibid., p. 37

To think that it is the function of philosophy to settle such issues is to misunderstand the role of philosophical inquiry in the analysis of religious beliefs. The function of philosophy is not to give a descriptive account of religious beliefs and activities, but to give a conceptual account of what such activities are. It is not the task of philosophy to settle the issue of whether there is a God, or whether there is going to be a final judgment, but to clarify what it means either to affirm or to deny the existence of God or of the final judgment. In making such a clarification, philosophy may help to deal with certain difficulties which bother believers and non-believers; but it will not help either to believe or not to believe, nor will it add to or increase our religious knowledge.[151] Philosophy leaves everything as it is.

Philosophical confusion arises, then, from two primary sources: from the misconception of the role of philosophical analysis in the investigation of the logic of religious belief; and from the failure to recognize that religious belief as distinctive language-game, having its own distinctive criteria for determining what is intelligible, unintelligible, rational or irrational.

The problem with an apologist's approach, as Phillips sees it, has been not that he fails to see the critic is not playing the same game (Phillips says that he has "accepted the invitation to dance without recognizing the need to change the tune"[152]), but also that he has mis-

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[151] Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 10.

[152] Ibid., p. 1.

understood the role of philosophical analysis. The result has been disastrous. Many of Phillips' discussions on various topics can be understood as attempts to display how these philosophical confusions have resulted; for example, how "the reality of God" has been confused with being "logically akin to the reality of physical objects;"[153] the belief in "the reality of the dead" has been confused with being a belief that "the dead is 'still alive'"[154]; the belief in the "last judgment" has been confused with being a belief in the empirical fact, "a future event"[155] and so on. Phillips offers many examples covering a large number of Christian beliefs.

Once we recognize the sources of this philosophical confusion and understand that we do not have to accept the challenge unless the conditions have been changed, Phillips thinks that we are acting properly. In other words, religious beliefs, seen from the perspective of the user of the language, and judged by the criteria found within the religious community, *are in order as they are*. Thus to the challenge we have presented, Phillips has this reply:

> When the positivist claims that there is no God because God cannot be located, the believer does not object on the grounds that the investigation has not been thorough enough, but on the grounds that the investigation fails to understand the grammar

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[153]Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, p. 21. Cf. *Religion Without Explanation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), p. 171.

[154]Phillips, *Religion without Explanation*, chap. 8.

[155]Phillips, *Faith and Philosophical Inquiry*, p. 89.

of what is being investigated--namely, the reality of God.[156]

And Phillips' various remarks that "the meaningfulness of religious concepts are to be found within religion itself," that "to understand what prayer is (for example), one must refer to the religious community from which prayer derives its intelligibility," and his arguments for religious belief as self-evidently irreducible "dogmas of faith" and so on seem to support this conclusion.[157]

As a modest claim it can be said that users of Wittgenstein's language-game model throw some light on various uses of religious terms and doncepts. It can also be said that "by far the greatest part of the language used is for quite different purposes from communicating information or asserting religious truth."[158] However, if one takes the language-game model seriously in the philosophical approach to the analysis of religious language, one is faced with a number of serious difficulties.

One of the damaging consequences is that, if the language-game theory be accepted, any significant religious truth claim is impossible. This is the force of Sherry's criticism of Phillips,[159] and also of Hick's.[160]

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[156]Phillips, *Faith and Philosopphical Inquiry*, p. 2.

[157]Phillips, *Religion Without Explanation*, pp. 158ff.

[158]Donovan, *Religious Language*, p. 78.

[159]Patrick Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Game* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

[160]John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973).

This arises from the fact that Wittgensteinian philosophers themselves assert that religious utterances constitute an autonomous language-game, with its own criteria for determining what can and cannot be said. This means that religious utterances can carry no implication outside of their own language-game and, therefore, cannot be either supported or challenged. Since this is the case, no one language-game can have deeper truth or profounder understanding on any matter than any other. However, rightly or wrongly, religious discourse (as in Christianity) has often presupposed certain truth claims: that there is someone to trust, some truth to accept, some state of affairs to hope for. More than this, a Christian believer wants to claim that Christianity is true over against all other religious systems. On the language-game theory, however, no such significant truth claim is possible; and since to make such a claim is to confuse the logic of religious beliefs, religious beliefs can make no such claims. Phillips, for example, simply dismisses religious truth claim issues, as it were, saying as a philosopher it is none of his business to legislate whether or not "There is a God" is true. The task of philosophy is not to undertake such an analysis; the function of philosophy is to elucidate the meaning of what it means either to affirm or to deny the reality of God.

However, other philosophers, like Sherry and Hick, argue that philosophy may not decide whether "There is a God" is true, but it is the business of philosophy to help the believer to see whether his belief in the reality of God, for example, is a "reasonable" one; and philosophy

does it precisely-along the line indicated by Phillips, namely by clarifying what it means either to affirm or to deny the reality of God.[161] And it seems to me that these philosophers have a strong point against the language-game theory in this particular dasue.

Also to hold that religious utterances have their own internal set of criteria has been strongly questioned as regards to whether such articles of faith are self-evidently true to believers as Phillips claims that they are. This is the crux of Nielsen's criticism of the language-game theory. Again Nielsen has a point on this count. Nielsen points out that, if it were true, as the language-game theory claims, that religious beliefs are self-evidently true like Moore's basic propositions "Here is a hand," "There is a tea cup," the question arises as to how there have always been religious sceptics and scoffers? Such men are not from outside but from inside!

> We should counterpose against the fact that religious language is a *fait accompli* another fact, namely, that at all times and at all places, even among the most primitive tribes, there have been sceptics and scoffers, people who though perfectly familiar with the religious language-game, not because they could not, but because, even though they were perfectly familiar with it, even though they had an insider's understanding of it, they found it incoherent... There are people...who find, or at least think they find, the religious language-game they have been taught as children either falderal or at best, in Santayana's celebrated phrase, "moral poetry." This seems to me to count heavily, though surely not decisively, against thinking that at rock bottom such talk must have a coherent order.[162]

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[161] Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, p. 30.

[162] Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism," p. 94.

The second important point which Nielsen evinces is the idea that the language-game theory makes the use of religious language reserved, as it were, for the "members only." Nielsen points out that the conceptual structures found within religion are constantly being used by theologians as well as by scientists, and so on. In short, religious discourse, scientific discourse, moral discourse, etc. are all part of the same over-all structure;[163] no mode of discourse is as "compartmentalized" as the language-game theory wants us to believe. Peter Donovan makes this remark: "It is, then, a misleading over-simplification to treat religious language as a self-contained system, entirely insulated from language used in other ways."[164]

However, what appears to be the fundamental weakness of such a theory is this: Phillips states that he was led to investigate religious activities such as prayer, confession, thanksgiving, etc., because he was philosophically puzzled over such questions as "How do we know that there is someone listening to us when we pray?" When we talk to God, in what sense do we understand what the believers say?[165] These are, of course, proper philosophical problems that demand investigation and possible clarification. Wittgensteinian philosophers are still on the right track when they insist that we can know what a religious man is saying

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[163]Nielsen, "Wittgensteinian Fideism," p. 201.

[164]Donovan, *Religious Language*, p. 94.

[165]D. Z. Phillips, "Religious Belief and Philosophical Inquiry. A Reply to Dr. Hick and Dr. Palmer" in *Theology* 71, 1968, pp. 114-15.

only by looking at what he is doing. They then ask, "Believers confess their sins to God, they give thanks to him and ask him for various things, but what do confession, thanking and asking come to in this context?" This is a strange question to me. If the believer is "confessing" his sins, isn't he *confessing* his sins? If the believer is "giving thanks" to God, isn't he *giving thanks* to him? If the believer is "praying" to God, isn't he *praying*? It seems to me very clear, if the believer is "confessing," "giving thanks," and "praying" to God, he *is* confessing; he *is* giving thanks to God and he *is* praying; what else could he be doing? What else is there to say? What else is the meaning there to explain?

But Phillips thinks that a believer is doing something else. But it is never clear to me what Phillips means when he says that a believer is doing something else. He has a great deal to say about philosophical confusions, but he has very little to say about what a believer is, in fact, doing.

Let us now turn to the full analysis of the line of argument alluded to above, namely, to the fact that saying *is* doing.

CHAPTER III

DOING THINGS WITH RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Looking at the progress we have made so far, we can highlight a few important points. Our main dissatisfaction with the noncognitivist theory of religious language has been that the theory gives no room for any significant religious truth claim. The theory even denies that a believer wants to say anything about the world in which he lives. But this is directly contrary to the actual intention of the believer's use of religious language. It is obvious that a believer wants to claim that his language is in some sense meaningful, and it is obvious that his language is in some sense true. No theory of religious language will do justice if it fails to satisfy these two aspects of his language.

The cognitivist theory of religious language recognizes that a believer wants to say something about the world in which he lives. But the theory has nothing significant to offer to the question, "How is this language possible?" The reason for this failure appears to have been (1) that the advocates of this theory are still working within the framework of the positivist theory of meaning, tacitly accepting the positivist's criterion for knowledge; (ii) that they have no clear theory of meaning and criterion for knowledge of their own. Consequently, the theory has

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failed to give any satisfactory answer to the question of "How is such religious language possible?"

The language-game theory has some promising points to offer. The suggestion that we look at a believer's actual use of religious language in order to discover the meaning of what he is doing has been a great contribution, despite the fact that the theory does not make use of it. However, the theory has the weakness of treating every mode of discourse as a self-contained, totally insulated system, immune to criticism from outside. Further, by denying any attempt to justify religious beliefs as being confused either by producing empirical evidence or by the method of philosophical reasoning, the theory is open to a non-cognitivist interpretation. The sacrifice of religious truth for religious meaning is too high a price to pay.

Meaning

The critics who have denied any cognitive meaning to religious language, like Blackstone, admit that the conclusion drawn in his book can be rebutted by rejecting the premises (the account of cognitive meaning and criterion for knowledge) from which the conclusions are drawn.[166] They admit that such utterances as "Close the door," "What time is it?" "Do not go near that dog!" are cognitively meaningful even though they do not purport to be verifiable or falsifiable. These critics have not stated their reasons for accepting such utterances as cognitively mean-

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[166]Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 168.

ingful; it may be that they accept such utterances as cognitively meaningful because in using them we mean what we say, namely, we are requesting, asking a question, and giving an order.

We started our analysis of religious language with an assumption that religious utterances are literal in some sense, and that religious language has a close kinship with our everyday use of ordinary language. We acknowledged the positive contribution of Wittgensteinian practioners that we can understand the meaning of what a religious man is doing by paying close attention to the actual use of his language in a religious context. The question then follows, "Can we provide an alternative theory of meaning and criterion for knowledge along this line?" I believe we can.

Many contemporary philosophers find it extremely hard to understand how some thinkers can be so "hard-headed" as to insist that a cognitively meaningful utterance must be true or false. These philosophers, like Warnock, argue that a little reflection will show that such a doctrine is "palpably untrue."

> Clearly there is an enormous number of such sentences (the sentences which have no concern whatever with true and falsity). There are imperative sentences, used (mainly) to give orders; and interrogative sentences, used (mainly) to ask questions. There are sentences used as prayers; to make promises; to give verdicts; to express decisions; to pass moral judgments; or to make proposals. It is nonsensical to ask of a question, an order, a prayer, or a proposal whether it is true or false. The judge who rules that the witness must answer cannot be told that what he says is untrue... his ruling may be regarded as correct or improper, it may be disputed, accepted, upheld, or set aside; but it cannot be either verified or falsified... As soon as we think of the multifarious uses of language, it becomes glaringly obvious that there is a vast number of sen-

> tences in connection with which the question "Is it true or false?" is, in varying degrees, absurd or out of place.[167]

A man in uttering such sentences as "How are you?" or "I promise," will be "greeting" or making a "promise"; the speaker can be sincere or insincere in his greeting or making a promise, but hardly can his sentence be true or false. Yet it would be hard to believe that such sentences are nonsense.

An alternative account has found wide-spread acceptance among the contemporary philosophers: the definition of meaning in terms of its *use*. As Wittgenstein says: "For a large class of cases--though not for all--in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language."[168] Or as Warnock puts it:

> In general to know the meaning of a sentence is to know how to use it, to know in what circumstances its use is correct or incorrect... A sentence is meaningful if it has a use; we know its meaning if we know its use.[169]

It will, however, be a mistake if we think that the use of words and their meaning are identical. Except in a trivial sense, it can be said that if we do not know how to use a word, we do not know its meaning; and conversely, if we do not know its meaning, we will not know how to use it properly. However, in learning a foreign language it is easy to pick up

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[167]G. J. Warnock, "Verification and the Use of Language" in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* V, 1951. Reprinted in T. Oleshewsky, ed., *Problems in the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Holt, 1969). Quoted from this reprint, pp. 184-85.

[168]Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation*, p. 20e.

[169]Warnock, "Verification and the Use of Language," p. 190.

certain words, phrases, and use them properly without actually knowing their meaning. It took me a long time to understand that the word "blonde" is a description of a girl's hair and complexion, although I could say "She is blonde" without actually knowing what I was saying. One summer I was informed that I was to be employed as a "bus boy." I wrote back saying, "I will be glad to work as a 'bus boy'" thinking that I would be employed as a "handiman" in a camp bus service. Imagine my surprise when I found that I had to clean the dining tables! Incidents of this sort clearly show that "use" and "meaning" are not identical.

Moreover, what appears to me is that the definition of meaning in terms of its "use"in language is unncessarily vague; and what appears to have proper meaning is the sentence. It is true that we can ask for the meaning of a word, we look it up in the dictionary. But what gives it proper meaning is the context or the sentence in which it appears. As Austin says:

> Properly speaking, what alone has meaning is a sentence. Of course we can speak quite properly of, for example, looking up "the meaning of a word" in a dictionary. Nevertheless, it appears that the sense in which a word or a phrase "has meaning" is derivative from the sense in which a sentence "Has a meaning"; tp say a word or a phrase "has meaning" is to say that there are sentences in which it occurs which "have meaning": and to know the meaning which the word or phrase has is to know the meanings of sentences in which it occurs. All the dictionary can do when we "look up the meaning of a word" is to suggest aids to the understanding of sentences in which it occurs. Hence it appears correct to say that what "has meaning" in the primary sense is the sentence.[170]

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[170] J. L. Austin, "The Meaning of a Word" in *Philosophical Papers*. Edited by J. Urmston and G. Warnock (London: OUP, 1961), p. 124.

Our primary concern here is with the meaning of a sentence, and not with the meaning of a word or phrase which occurs in a sentence. Or to be more precise, our concern is with the meaning communicated in the uttering of a sentence. The presupposition on which we are proceeding with this analysis of meaning is that the uttering of speech-act is the minimal unit for linguistic communication. Searle expresses it thus:

> All linguistic communication involves linguistic acts. The unit of linguistic communication is not, as has generally been supposed, the symbol, word or sentence, or even the token of the symbol, word or sentence, but rather the production or issuance of the symbol or word or sentence in the performance of the speech act. To take the token as a message is to take it as a produced or issued token. More precisely, the production or issuance of a sentence token under certain conditions is a speech act, and speech acts (of certain kinds to be explained later) are the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication.[171]

We will use the expression "speech-act" in the sense of doing something with speech, the act of speaking a language. Or as Austin has it: "...to *say* something is to *do* something; or in which *by* saying or *in* saying something we are doing something.[172] That is, to say "How are you?" is to offer a greeting; to say "Please pass the butter," is to make a request; to say "I am sorry," is to apologize. In making such utterances the speaker is performing a speech-act of a "greeting," a "request," and an "apology." And it seems to me that the meaning of such speech-acts issued unambiguously lies in a hearer's understanding of what speech-act

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[171] John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 24.

[172] J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1955), p. 12.

is being performed. In issuing a speech-act of request, if the hearer understands that he is being requested, undoubtedly by our minimun understanding of meaning, the hearer knows the meaning of the speech-act issued. If the speech-act of greeting is being performed, and if the hearer understands that he is being greeted, we say that the hearer knows the meaning of the speech-act issued. If this minimum claim of meaning be granted, we may *loosely* define meaning by saying that to know the meaning of a sentence entails knowing the sort of speech-act that is being performed.

Let us consider the sentence "The bull is in the field." In saying this the speaker can be performing different speech-acts depending upon the intention of the speaker and the context. In one given context it may be issued to give an "information"; in some other context to "give a warning"; or to make a "statement." By our definition of meaning, the hearer understands the meaning of "The bull is in the field," only when he knows that he is being "informed," or he is being "warned," or when he knows that the speaker is "stating" that there is a bull in the field.

If this sounds plausible, then we can speak of the "meaning" in terms of what Austin calls "illocutionary act." We ought not, however, to suggest that Austin defines meaning in terms of illocutionary act. Roughly speaking, for Austin meaning is equivalent to sense and reference,[173] and he makes a distinction between "meaning" and illocutionary

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[173]Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, p. 94.

"forces." However, my present contention is simply that if knowing the meaning of a sentence is understanding the kind of speech-act a speaker is performing, then the definition of the meaning of a sentence in terms of Austin's illocutionary act must essentially be correct.

An illocutionary act for Austin means, in general, an act of performing a "locutionary act," that is, an act of saying a *meaningful* sentence. So Austin says that to perform a locutionary act is *eo ipso* to perform an illocutionary act.[174] This is, however, misleading. One performs an illocutionary act *in* performing a locutionary act; that is, *in* saying "The bull is in the field" (a locutionary act), we give an "information," etc., which is an "illocutionary act." Thus in performing certaion locutionary acts, we "warn," "greet," "divorce," "state," "inform," "marry," "promise" and do all kinds of things; and giving a "warning," "greeting," "stating," "informing," "marrying," "promising" are illocutionary acts. To determine what illocutionary act is performed, we must determine in what way we are using the locution:

> asking or answering a question,
> giving some information or an assurance or a warning,
> announcing a verdict or an intention,
> pronouncing a sentence,
> making an appointment or an appeal or a criticism,
> making an identification or giving a description,
> and the numerous like.[175]

It is important to note that whatever may be the kind of illocutionary act a speaker is issuing, he must know in what way the speaker is using

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[174] Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 98.

[175] Ibid.

the locution, that is, what sort of illocutionary act is being performed. If the speaker issues the locution "How are you," as a greeting, and the hearer starts explaining about his health, or the things that happen to him, by our definition of meaning, he has failed to understand the meaning of the sentence. The hearer understands the meaning of the sentence "How are you," only when he knows that the speaker is greeting him.

We notice that the same sentence can be issued for performing different illocutionary acts under different contexts. The locution "The bull is in the field" as seen before, may be issued for a "warning," an "informing" or a "statement." For example, if the bull is dangerous, "The bull is in the field" can be understood as a "warning"; if someone has lost the bull, "The bull is in the field" can be understood as giving information; or on some other occasion, "The bull is in the field" can be understood as "stating" the fact that the bull is in the field, etc. This being so, we can define "meaning" in terms of illocutionary act potential rather than in terms of an illocutionary act as suggested above. The term "potential" does not mean potential in the Aristotelian sense of an acorn potentially being a tree. The term "potential" here expresses a mere possibility of various illocutionary acts in the actual issuance. Thus an understanding of the meaning of a sentence will demand the hearer's ability to grasp in what sense the sentence is being used, or what kind of illocutionary act is being issued.

If we were to ask, "How would one know in what way a sentence is being used or what kind of illocutionary act is being performed?" it

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would have to be admitted that apart from the hearer's linguistic intuition (which may not be a sure guide!) it is very difficult to say. In general, however, it can be said that the context will help us. For example as Austin says:

> ...that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be explained by the context in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange.... "He meant it as an order" etc.[176]

Then also the question of intonation, facial expression, blinking of the eyes, general gestures, are relevant factors in getting us to know in what sense or for what purposes a sentence is being used. However, if the question "How?" is pressed, all we can say is that, although it is extremely difficult to be precise, nevertheless somehow we manage. Let me quote once again Austin:

> Nearly everybody can recognize a surly look or the smell of tar, but few can describe them noncommitally....many can recognize and "with certainty" ports of different vintages, models by different fashion houses, shades of green, motor-car makes from behind, and without being able to be "more specific about it"--they can only tell "by the taste," "from the cut" and so on.[177]

We should also note that to perform an illocutionary act it is not necessary to use linguistic convention. There are many nonverbal conventions which one can use to perform an illocutionary act. Thus on certain occasions (for example, at the breakfast table), to make a request one need not use the standard request convention such as "Please pass me...."; "looking" at the next person may be counted as making a request.

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[176] Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 100.

[177] Austin, "Other Minds," p. 53.

We all use some such nonlinguistic conventions as nodding one's head, shaking one's head, bowing down, waving one's hand, holding one's hands together, etc. Thus we simply "nod" to agree with a person; "shake" our head to disagree and so on.

We should also note that even within a specific linguistic convention there are many conventions which one can use for performing such an illocutionary act as making a request. It is not necessary to list them, although it is interesting to note that certain sentences which look like ordinary questions as "Would you mind if I..." "Would you please..." and so on can be used as request convention; even straightforward statements in certain situations can be used as request conventions. For example, at a party, "It is 11 o'clock" can mean a request to leave! When a child comes to a dinner table with dirty hands his father may simply say, "Your hands are dirty." The child will understand that he is being told to go and wash his hands.

The definition of meaning in terms of illocutionary act potential does not deny such uses. It simply claims that whatever may be the device one is using to perform a particular illocutionary act, if the hearer understands the kind of illocutionary act that is being performed, then by our definition the hearer has so far understood the meaning of the sentence. This is all it claims.

Before advancing any further, we should also note a very closely related concept, the concept of rules. Searle argues that speaking a language is "engaging in a (highly complex) rule-governed behavior."[178] It

[178] Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 12.

is fairly easy to see how, in a game like chess, each move is made according to the rules of chess. These rules are clearly well defined and they do not merely regulate the game but define its very possibility. Thus expressions such as "the queen is forked," and "checkmate" are used to describe certain situations in chess and it makes no sense to ask "Why does 'checkmate' mean win the game?" or "Why can't you move your queen when she is 'forked'?" Such questions are out of place because, by the very rules of the game, "the queen is forked" means that you cannot move your queen without losing her; "checkmate" means the game is won.

However, the internal rules that govern the use of language are not so clearly formalized as are the rules of chess or basketball. It may, therefore, be easy to see how speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed behavior. However, we see that a request to close the door will be defective if the door is already shut; nor can we ask a person to sit down when he has already taken his seat. A man cannot divorce his wife by saying "I divorce you" while eating a dinner, and without observing certain conventions; nor will a pastor be baptizing a person by saying "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, etc." while the candidate is taking his bath. Thus one does not "sentence" a prisoner, "arrest" a person, "call a player out," "give an order" without having acted in accordance with certain rules.

On the other hand, if the situation and the circumstances are appropriate, and the rules are observed, then, by saying "I baptize you in the name of the Father, etc." the pastor does baptize the person;

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and by saying "I divorce you," the speaker gets divorced; by saying "I arrest you" the speaker arrests a person, etc. Since this is the case, when the situation and the circumstances are appropriate, and when the speaker observes certain rules, as Austin says, "saying *is* doing."[179] However, we ought to be very clear that saying is not *ipso facto* doing in the full sense of the term. A man is not performing an illocutionary act simply by emitting some audible noises. In other words, uttering a full-fledged speech-act is performing an act according to the set of constitutive rules.

Without advancing any further, let us tabulate the set of rules that a speech-act has to fulfill in order that it may be counted as, say a happy request. The tabulation of the rules for the happy request is somewhat similar to the tabulation given by McClendon and Smith, and yet there are significant differences.[180] These differences basically suggest the differences of the nature of the problem under investigation. McClendon and Smith are addressing themselves to the problem of pluralism--"conflicts about convictions," whereas I am chiefly concerned with the logical function of the language we use to express our religious affirmations. In order that this language be counted as cognitively meaningful language according to contemporary critics, what conditions should it fulfill? This question has a direct bearing on my investigation of

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[179]Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 12.

[180]McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Convictions*, pp. 59-60.

the tabulated rules. As I understand them, McClendon and Smith are not directly concerned with this issue. This is the underlying reason for my disagreement in the interpretation of the "representative character of the intended speech-act" which is my primary disagreement with their account.

Now let us imagine a situation in which three persons A, B and C are sitting at a dinner table at which A asks B "Please pass me the bread." What is to happen for A's request of B to be counted as a *happy* request?

i. The speaker A is using a language which the hearer B can understand; and at the time of issuing a request device or convention A is not joking or play-acting but is seriously issuing it; B is free from physical impediments such as deafness, etc.; A's sound production is clearly audible to B; and both A and B are conscious of the act.

ii. There is a standard or recognized device or convention accepted both by A and B to the effect that A's issuing of the accepted request device or convention in the language common to both A and B counts and is understood by B as requesting (bread).

iii. A's issuing of the request indicates with sufficient clarity the state of affairs (the bread on the table); on the basis of A's issued request device, B can identify it as the requested state of affairs, and in issuing the request device A wants B to understand A's intention of issuing the request device; on the basis of A's issued request device B understood A's intention (namely, A wants B to pass the bread) and it is not obvious either to A or B that the state of affairs is going to come about in the ordinary course of events in some near future without A's having recourse to issuing the request device (that is, the bread is not

going to crawl into A's hands as it were by the touch of magic, without A's actually having requested it).

iv. Finally, it is possible for B to perform what is being requested of him (namely, to pass the bread).

It is not necessary to make a long comment on these rules; they are self-explanatory, even trivial. Although these rules are formulated for one speech-act, namely for an illocutionary act of request, they can be used as a model for other speech-acts (with appropriate variations).

Rule (i) states certain prerequisite conditions for any speech-act and is equivalent to McClendon and Smith's "Preconditions"[181] and Searle's "Normal input and output."[182] When a serious use of language is involved this rule requires that a speaker and a hearer must have a common language, and the speaker must mean what he says. There no doubt may be some speech-acts which require no hearer and demand no common language. But as McClendon and Smith point out, "Nevertheless, it does seem correct to say that without the existence of hearers and a common language there would be no such things as speech-acts to begin with."[183]

Rule (ii) is equivalent to McClendon and Smith's "Primary Conditions"[184] and Searle's essential conditions.[185] This rule states that

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[181] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 59. Cf. "Religious Language after J. L. Austin," p. 56.

[182] Searle, *Speech Acts*, p. 57.

[183] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 61.

[184] Ibid., p. 59.

[185] Austin, *Speech Acts*, p. 60.

there should be recognized and accepted conventions for the performance of an intended speech-act, and according to our example the speaker must use one of such bread-requesting conventions as "Bread, please"; "Please pass the bread"; "Would you pass the bread, please?" etc. The range of possibility may be wide, but it is not boundless.

This rule safeguards certain things. We cannot for example say, "Excalibur" and look at the bread. There is not a commonly recognized and accepted bread-requesting convention known as "Excalibur." So if we say "Excalibur" we will not be requesting bread; in Austinian language it is a "misfire," or a request which is "null and void."[186]

Rule (iii) is somewhat equivalent to McClendon and Smith's "Affective or Psychological Conditions" except it also embraces what they call "Representative conditions."[187] The reasons for not treating "representative conditions" as a separate rule (which are also the reasons for disagreement) can be stated thus: (a) the use of the device/convention for the performance of an illocutionary act can be distinguished from what an illocutionary act is about; that is, an illocutionary act of request, for example, is distinct from what is being requested. As far as I am aware, McClendon and Smith do not make this distinction. (b) The meaning of illocutionary act issued primarily lies in the hearer's understanding of the kind of illocutionary act that is being performed; for example,

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[186] Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 16.

[187] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, pp. 59-60.

the meaning of an illocutionary act of request primarily lies in the hearer's understanding that a request is being made of him, and only derivatively what that request is. Thus an understanding of what is being requested (a state of affairs, a representative character, referent etc)) is derivative from the meaning of an illocutionary act performed and it can only function as elucidatory; (c) for this very reason, the meaning of an illocutionary act can be understood apart from its representative character; for example, "I warn you" can be understood as a warning without the knowledge of what one is being warned of. Interestingly enough in the cases of misunderstanding an illocutionary act such as a request, for example, I made a request of Bill to pass me the bread and he passes me the butter; what has happened was that it is not the request itself that was misunderstood but what was referred to in the request, namely, the bread, that was misunderstood. If we maintain that a request itself is misunderstood, then Bill cannot even pass the butter!

But in the cases where an illocutionary act has a representative character, the representative character plays a very important role in the speech-act, so that, if we do not take the representative character into account, understanding of the illocutionary act is incomplete. I will return to this point shortly.

And finally, there are many speech-acts which do not have any representative character at all. Examples of this kind are: "How are you?" (greeting), "I promise you" (making a promise), "Run!" (giving a warning), "I apologize" (apologizing), etc.

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The rule (iii) states that in issuing a request convention the speaker should make his meaning sufficiently clear to the hearer, so that the hearer on the basis of the request convention issued, should be able to get the intended meaning. Thus the hearer's understanding of the intended meaning seems to consist of the following elements:

a. that the hearer should know that a request is being made of him;

b. that the hearer should know that the speaker *wants* him to know that the request is being made of him;

c. and that the hearer knows what the request is.

In understanding the meaning of the speech-act, the first two elements are of primary importance and the last one is derivative. The state of affairs referred to in the speech-act, namely "the bread on the table" is derivative in the sense that, if the hearer only understands that the speaker is saying something about the bread, and does not know that a request is being made of him, then the hearer has not understood the issued illocutionary act at all; he has totally missed the speaker's point of issuing that particular illocutionary act. This view is supported by the fact that the hearer's following reply makes perfect sense: "I know he says something about the bread, but I do not know what he wants with it, so I do not know what to do about it."

On the other hand, if the hearer understands that a request is being made of him, then we say that he has partly understood the meaning of the intended illocutionary act. In other words, the *minimum* required criterion for the knowledge claim of the intended speech-act can be expressed

thus: that the hearer must know what illocutionary act the speaker is performing; if the speaker is performing an illocutionary act of "request," the hearer must know that a request is being made of him; if a "promise," that he must know that he is being promised something and so on.

However, in the example under consideration (the request to pass the bread), the hearer's understanding that the request is being made of him is insufficient for the understanding of the total meaning of the illocutionary act performed. Thus apart from his understanding that the request is being made of him, he must also know what he is being requested. That is, only when the hearer understands that a request is being made of him, and that he is being requested to pass the bread, and that the speaker wants the bread, can we say that the hearer has fully understood the meaning of the illocutionary act performed.

The rest of the rules are self-explanatory, and therefore demand no further elucidation.

The Meaning of Religious Utterances

At the beginning of this thesis I made the sweeping statement that religious utterances are literal in some sense of the term "literal" and that they are closely related to the everyday use of ordinary language. Since the central debate in the contemporary philosophy of religion concerns the question as to whether or not religious utterances are cognitively meaningful, that is, whether religious utterances have literal meaning, if we could define the sense in which religious utterances are

literal, and if we could demonstrate the sense in which religious utterances are closely related to the everyday use of ordinary language, we could successfully answer the contemporary challenge to religion.

A statement has literal meaning, according to cognitivist philosophers, when a statement can be true or false, which means that a statement should at least in principle be confirmable or infirmable; that is, certain empirical data must be relevant either to confirm or disconfirm the putative truth claims. This again means that the reality of God must be logically akin to the reality of physical objects, which in plain language means that "God lives in heaven" must be logically the same as "Jim lives in Berkeley"; or "God feeds the cattle upon a thousand hills" should logically function as does "Mrs. Don feeds her chickens." Here we reached the rock-bottom of the problem we are interested in. The reason for the denial that religious utterances have literal or cognitive meaning lies in the fact that "God feeds the cattle upon a thousand hills" is not the same in logic as "Mrs. Don feeds her chickens." Or "God lives in heaven" is not the same in logic as "Jim lives in Berkeley."

However, as we have seen, the cognitivists and the nocognitivists, the Wittgensteinian philosophers and the critics of religious language, all acknowledge the fact that God is not an object that can be seen in a telescope and he cannot be detected by any scientific instrument; all philosophers concerned admit that heaven cannot be heard by radio, that heaven is not a place which can be located on a map of the universe as Oxford can be located on the map of the United Kingdom; all agree that

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the Last Judgment is not a future event in the sense that the trial of Mrs. Indira Gandhi is a future event (that is, that which is going to take place in the future, say June 17, 1990).

All the philosophers concerned will agree that religious utterances are not literal in the sense we have described above. Even Hick's believer will agree that his language is not literal in quite the way we have described it above.[188] God is not out there in the way a stone, a tree, a planet are "out there."

Although philosophers agree that God is not an object among objects, that he cannot be seen in a telescope, that heaven cannot be heard by radio, that prayer as talking to "someone," God, cannot be understood as my talking to a "someone" who is another human being who occupies space and speaks the same human language, yet the philosopphers have often felt that a believer's use of language to pray (to confess, to repent and to adore) suggests that there *is* someone to pray to, there *is* some truth to accept, there *is* a state of affairs to look forward to and hope for. What sort of language is this? How do we understand such talk? If "God lives in heaven" is not logically akin to "Jim lives in Berkeley," how can we understand "God lives in heaven" which certainly looks like an assertion?

The line of approach I have taken to meet the challenge is radically different from the approaches taken by both the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists. The Wittgensteinian philosophers are correct in pointing out that the problem stated above arises because the philosophers have

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[188]Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, pp. 25-27.

been confused about the nature of religious language. In our terminology the problem is created by or results from the tacit acceptance of the positivist's theory of meaning and his criteria for knowledge. If our analysis has been correct, it shows that the cognitivist and the noncognitivist have failed to meet the challenge successfully because they were still working within the framework of a positivist system.

But why should we? The critics themselves point out that we do not have to accept their theory of meaning and criteria for knowledge. All that we need is to provide another theory of meaning and criteria for knowledge which will give us a different understanding of the meaning of "being literal." We have found such an understanding of speaking literally in "meaning what we say," which we have described in terms of illocutionary acts. Thus in saying "Please pass me the bread," I am making a request; in saying "Close the door," I give an order. And my speaking of such utterances and meaning what I say is *literal*, as the critics like Nielsen admitted. Therefore, if such utterances have literal meaning, they are cognitively meaningful; and without any doubt such discourse belongs to the everyday use of ordinary language.

Thus, if we can show that religious utterances function on the same logical level as do the other ordinary illocutionary acts, then we will be able to show that religious utterances function in the same logical way as does everyday use of ordinary language. This will also help us to see that a religious man is not playing a different language-game as the Wittgensteinian philosophers have suggested; that there is no separ-

ate set of rules for determining the meaningfulness of religious language. The rules that determine the meaningfulness of religious language belong to over-all linguistic rules.

The question is then, "Can we claim that the illocution, the full fledged speech-act, is central to religious utterances as well?" Or can we claim that a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act? My answer is purely and simply, "Yes."

In my final criticism of the language-game theory, I alluded to Phillips' question, "What is a believer doing when he confesses his sins to God?" etc., and I reply that, if the believer is confessing his sins to God, then he *is* confessing his sins to God; what else could he be doing? In other words, if he is confessing his sins sincerely, that is, meaning literally what he says, then he is confessing and he could not be doing anything else. Let us spell this out as carefully as we can.

The analysis of meaning in terms of a speech-act shows that in a speech-act we discover one of the fundamental uses of human speech. It shows us the kind of things we can and we cannot do in speaking, and it shows us how they are done. The analysis of meaning in terms of speech-act does not claim to be the over-all theory of all meaningful uses of language. But it does claim that the institutionalized or conventionalized use of language is one of the most fundamental uses of human speech, and in the conventionalized use of language we do greet, warn, promise and do other things by the use of locutions.

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Religious language is undoubtedly a conventionalized use of human language. Consider the following sentences:

a. I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

b. I pronounce you to be legally wedded as husband and wife.

c. Thank you God, for this new day.

d. I have sinned against you and against my fellow men; I am truly sorry and repent of all my sins.

e. God has given me many blessiggs.

Now if the situation is appropriate, to utter any of the sentences listed above will be performing religious speech-acts, that is, the speaker will be engaging in a certain religious activity. Thus in uttering (a), the speaker will be "baptizing"; (b) "marrying" the couple; (c) "praying"; (d) "repenting" of his sins; and (e) "witnessing" to God's blessings.

Any attempt to understand such utterances listed above as "describing a situation and explaining it" will be a total misunderstanding of the use of religious language. The pastor who utters (a), for example, is not describing baptism; he is not reporting it, nor is he explaining it, but he is performing an act of baptism. The man who utters (e) is not doing an inventory in order to see what are the things he has received from God, but he is engaging in an act of witnessing. Therefore, an attempt to understand such an utterance as "God has given me many blessings," by raising such questions as "What are the things that the speaker has received from God? When did he receive them? Can he name at least one

item from among the things he claims to have received from God?" will be a total misunderstanding. He is not describing a state of affairs but he is engaging in an act of witnessing.

However, it may be argued that the line of interpretation is correct only in the most trivial sense. That is, any regular church-goer knows, for example, when the pastor in a Sunday morning worship service prays by uttering a string of words, that he *is* praying; when he preaches by uttering a string of words, everyone knows that he *is* preaching, etc. Whether such an understanding is or is not worthy of a knowledge claim, I do not here now wish to contest. What I want to note is that, if the speaker is truly and sincerely praying, he *is* praying; this is what he is doing.

Thus when a believer uses language to perform religious illocutionary acts, that is, when he uses religious utterances in order to baptize, to marry, to repent, to confess, etc., his language has a literal meaning; that is, his language is *actually* meaningful. His language is meaningful because he means what he says, namely, he *is* repenting, confessing, praying, etc. Just as when a person says "Please pass the bread," he is making a request. But we should also note, in the case of the bread-requesting convention, for the speaker to have successfully requested bread, there should be bread on the table. Were there no bread on the table, a speaker's request would have been defective, or it would be an "abuse" as Austin calls it.[189]

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[189]Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 18.

Analogously, if "God has given me many blessings" is a "happy" witness, then it is not enough for the hearer just to understand that the speaker is witnessing, but he must know *what* the speaker is witnessing to; or simply, the hearer must know to what the speaker is referring. If the hearer does not know what the speaker is referring to, then the witness cannot be a "happy" witness.

In our analysis of the bread-request convention we maingain that the descriptive features of the speech-act are very important for the understanding of total meaning of the speech-act performed. Nevertheless, however important they may be, their function in the speech-act is secondary, and the meaning of the intended speech-act primarily lies in the hearer's understanding of the kind of speech-act that is being performed. The same thing applies to religious speech-acts also. The representative features are important but their function is derivative. But this should not be understood as minimizing the importance of the representative feature of the religious speech-act. Just as in the case of requesting bread, if the hearer understands only that he is being requested but does not understand that he is being requested to pass the bread, he does not fully understand the request; so also in the case of witnessing: it is not enough for the hearer to know that the speaker is witnessing, but he must know that the speaker is witnessing to the blessings he has received from God. When the hearer has thus understood, according to our analysis, he can claim that he has understood the illocutionary act of witnessing.

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We may anticipate the objection that will be raised by, for example, critics of religious language, that the hearer *cannot* understand what the speaker means by "having received many blessings from God." Without spelling out the implications of the "cannot" (because it would mean a great deal of repetition of what has been said before), I want to point out that the objection rests on the presupposition that "God has given me many blessings" functions on the same logical level as "John brought me many Christmas presents," which presupposition we have already rejected as being a confusion about the logic of religious language.

Thus we are claiming that the hearer can understand what the speaker is saying when he says that God has given him many blessings. But it is not necessarily self-evident that the sentence "God has given me many blessings" is a religious speech-act.[190] One can imagine a number of situations where "God has given me many blessings" is not a religious illocutionary act of witnessing. Consider, for example, situations where the speaker is joking, or speaking ironically, or reciting a sentence as part of the play. Under these situations "God has given me many blessings" is not part of religious discourse. Therefore, *ipso facto*, "God has given me many blessings" is not self-evidently a religious illocutionary act of witnessing. However, under certain appropriate situations, the utterance of "God has given me many blessings" *is* witnessing.

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[190] Cf. McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, pp. 65ff. and "Religious Language after J. L. Austin," pp. 58ff.

Let us stipulate a situation where the use of this locution can indisputably be counted as a part of religious discourse, an act of witnessing. Let us imagine a church meeting. One evening a few of the leading members gather together to discuss some of the pressing problems the church is facing, among them the church budget. After having described a grim financial situation, the chairman inquires whether he can secure some financial commitments. One of the members present then says: "I have troubles of my own but God has been so wonderful to me and to my family. God has given us many blessings. Therefore, as a token of my gratitude, I pledge $--- as my contribution for the good cause."

Now what does the speaker mean by "God has given me/us many blessings"? Undoubtedly in this religious circle, his utterance of this sentence will be understood as bearing a witness or as witnessing. In that meeting the hearers will know that the speaker is witnessing to what God has done for him and for his family. Of course, this cannot be the whole story. For the speaker to have happily and nondefectively performed a religious speech-act of witnessing, the appropriateness of the situation alone is not enough. Consider the situation where the speaker knows nothing about the blessings of God; he does not even believe in God; or suppose he does not mean what he says but he says it just to impress the hearers. Would he have successfully and nondefectively performed a religious illocutionary act of witnessing? If our analysis is correct, he would not; he would not be able to perform a religious illocutionary act of witness "happily," without believing in God and without understanding

what is meant by the blessing of God in the Christian tradition. Thus having performed a religious illocutionary act of witnessing, if the speaker does not act like a believer he may either defend the consistency by saying it had been misunderstood by the hearers, of plead weakness of the will. But he cannot reply, "So what? Never mind what I said!" If he does this something is wrong linguistically; either he does not understand what religious witnessing is, or he is a hypocrite.

Thus apart from the appropriateness of the situation, there are other conditions or rules which will determine the correct performance of the religious illocutionary act of witnessing, But before we lay down these rules, we should remind ourselves that our primary concern is with the convention or the device that we use for the performance of religious speech-acts. It is not being claimed that "God has given me many blessings" is the only convention that we can use to bear witness; and it is not even claimed that "God has given me many blessings" can be used for bearing witness only. The point I am making is that whatever religious convention is being used for the performance of a religious speech-act, it must fulfill certain required conditions, and the primary meaning of that religious speech-act will be tested by the hearer's understanding as to what particular speech-act is being performed. The other meanings in the speech-act will be elucidatory.

Of course I am not saying that the hearer will always get the meaning of what the speaker says. Sometimes he fails to get the meaning of what the speaker says, and when this happens we say that a hearer has *mis*understood what is being said.

Without pursuing the discussion any further, we can now pause for a question: What sort of rules are to be fulfilled for a religious illocutionary act such as "God has given me many blessings" to be counted as a *happy* witness? Keeping somewhat in line with the rules listed for a happy request, we can make the following formulation, avoiding the details and technicalities:

i. The speaker A is using a common language which some hearer B can understand; at the time of performing a witnessing act A is not joking or play-acting but is seriously issuing it; B is free from physical impediments such as deafness, etc. A's sound production is clearly audible to B, and both A and B are conscious of the act.

ii. There is a standard or recognized religious convention accepted by both A and B, to the effect that:
A's issuing of this accepted religious convention of witnessing in the language common to both A and B counts *in that language* as witnessing.

iii. In issuing a witnessing convention A has taken a stance and A's stance includes:
that a certain state of affairs A enjoys in life (both material and non-material) has not come about by his own effort, and that he honestly and sincerely believes that it has been given to him by someone other than some human beings; further that A shares with others in the Christian community the belief that this someone is God; and finally, that A is deeply committed to this belief.

iv. In issuing a witnessing convention A wants B to know A's stance, and on the basis of A's issued convention B understands A's stance; further, in issuing a witnessing convention A indicates with suffi-

> cient clarity the state of affairs, and on the basis of A's issued witnessing convention B gets a clear understanding of this state of affairs; and finally, in issuing a witnessing convention A wants B to know A's intention to evoke in B his own belief and understanding about the state of affairs, and B on the basis of A's issued witnessing convention understands and shares or does not share A's belief and understanding about this state of affairs.

The tabulated rules listed above somewhat materially resemble the tabulated rules listed by McClendon and Smith, but there are significant differences which we will see as we go along.[191]

I do not claim that these rules are conclusive and final, for details could always be filled in. Nevertheless, as a guideline, these rules seem to show a certain plausibility.

Rule (i) requires that there should be a hearer and that the speaker and hearer should use a common language. But some speech-acts do not seem to require either the hearer or the use of common language (such as a private prayer, meditation, silent confession, etc.). Nevertheless, it does seem correct to say that any serious public use of language demands that there should be a hearer and that he and the speaker should use a common language; otherwise, there can hardly be any religious speech-act.

Rule (ii) is somewhat equivalent to McClendon and Smith's "Primary conditions."[192] The positive point to remember is this: whether one is using a verbal or nonverbal convention (in theory it matters little), the

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[191] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, pp. 65-66.

[192] Ibid., p. 65

convention one is using must exist and it must be a recognized and accepted one. As long as the speaker uses one of such recognized and accepted conventions and the hearer understands the kind of speech-act a speaker is performing in using it, the matter is so far satisfactory; that is, it is satisfactory in so far as the speaker is witnessing and the hearer knows that he is witnessing.

McClendon and Smith further explicate the primary conditions of the "confession" they are analyzing, in that the speaker has taken "a stance" and that he is witnessing to "this stance."[193] Since the notion of "stance" or "belief" comes in my next rule, I will postpone my comment on it till then.

Rule (iii) includes certain aspects of what McClendon and Smith call "Representative conditions" and "Affective or Psychological conditions." As stated before, while analyzing a request for bread, the reasons for not treating them separately are:

a. that an act of witnessing, for example, as an illocutionary act is distinct from what the speaker is witness to;

b. that the meaning of an illocutionary act lies primarily in a hearer's understanding of the kind of illocutionary act that is being performed; and an understanding of what the speaker is witnessing to is important for the total meaning of the speech-act which has been performed, but it is derivative.

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[193] McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 66.

c. Then there are speech-acts which do not have representative features at all, yet we recognize them as full fledged speech-acts.

As I understand McClendon and Smith, they do not make a distinction between speech-acts such as "confessing" or "witnessing" and what these speech-acts are about. But if our analysis is correct, such a distinction is necessary. According to our analysis, if a hearer understands that he is being warned, he has partly understood the meaning of an illocutionary act "I warn you." Moreover, in the light of the problem raised by the contemporary philosophy of religion under investigation their approach faces serious difficulties. Take for example, their analysis of the utterance, "God led Israel across the Sea of Reeds." The question is, "Does this utterance function logically on the same level as the ordinary statement, 'Caesar led his soldiers across the river Rubicon/?" I do not think that it does, and to think that it does is a confusion of the logic of religious language. Thus we have been stressing the fact that heaven and hell are not places like Oxford and Hollywood are; that the Last Judgment is not a future event like the coming Christmas is. But religious speech-acts concern heaven and hell, the last judgment, the reality of God and so on; what sort of situation or state of affairs is the speaker referring to when he speaks about them such that his language might be called representative or descriptive?

Let us return to McClendon and Smith's example "God led Israel across the Sea of Reeds." "Israel crossed the Sea of Reeds" is a plain historical statement and according to contemporary philosophical views it pre-

sents no philosophical problem. (It may present problems for the historians but not for the philosophers.) But "*God* led Israel across the Sea of Reeds" creates serious philosophical problems. When McClendon and Smith are speaking of the representative character of this confession of Aleph, they are talking about Israel's *actual* crossing of the Sea of Reeds. As they say, "In Aleph's case, the Israelites as confessed must have crossed that sea... God, the God to whom the context refers, must be God, must exist."[194] I find it very difficult to understand how an ordinary historical statement can give a representative feature to a religious illocutionary act of confession.

Faced with such difficultues, I might maintain merely that if the hearer understands the kind of illocutionary act the speaker is performing, he has understood the meaning of the illocutionary act performed. But this position becomes incompatible with religious truth claims. It stresses the meaning of religious utterances at the expense of religious truth, which we have rejected as a not satisfactory account of religious language. In our understanding, a believer wants to claim that his language is literally meaningful in some sense, and he also wants to claim that it is true in some sense. (In what sense it is true will be our concern in the next chapter.) For this reason, among others, we found dissatisfaction with the accounts given by both the noncognitivist and the Wittgensteinian philosophers; Phillips, for example, dismisses the

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[194]McClendon and Smith, *Understanding Religious Conviction*, p. 69.

issue of religious truth claims saying, as it were, "As a philosopher, it is none of my business to settle whether or not what a believer says is true. As a philosopher, my business is to explain his meaning, what he means when he affirms or denies something."[195]

Therefore, we maintain that the hearer's understanding of what the speaker is witnessing to, repenting of, preaching about, is important to the total meaning of the illocutionary act performed. Thus to be a happy witness, it is not enough for the hearer to know what the speaker is witnessing; he should also know what he is witnessing to. The speaker is, of course, witnessing to the blessings of God. That is, he is taking a stance, a position; he is entertaining certain beliefs about certain things he considers important to him. The things he considers important in his life include both his material possessions--the furniture he has purchased, his money, his wife and children, his lands, cows, etc.; and also his spiritual (non-material) possessions--hs being able to be happy, the peace of mind he enjoys, the fellowship he shares with others, the joy of salvation he experiences which he shares with others. *The point is* that he believes that these are given to him by God; they are God's blessings to him.

After having taken this stance and borne witness to God's blessings the speaker when asked "Why do you live like an unbeliever?" cannot reply, "I have no sense of God or of his blessings." If he does, he is a liar

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[195]Cf. Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Game*, ch. 2.

and a hypocrite, or he does not understand what religious witnessing is. However, if he pleads that his hearers have misunderstood him, or that he has tried but has failed to live up to it, then his witnessing is still valid.

The critics may be puzzled about this account. They may claim that they do not understand it; they may say that it is either nonsensical or simply wrong. Whether it is wrong, I will postpone to the next chapter. But I am sure that the critics do understand the account. There is no mystery in all that has been said, because the critics claim to understand the meaning of asking a question, giving an order, etc.; so it will not do now to complain that they cannot understand the meaning of making a confession, bearing a witness; they should admit, "Agreed, when the pastor in a Sunday morning service utters a string of words to pray, we know that he is praying; we know that is what he is doing. But what we do not understand in your theory is that...." However, when they say this, either they are falling back upon the principle of verification for a theory of meaning and criterion for knowledge, which they themselves say that I can reject, or what they are saying is that they understand the account but do not accept/share the belief.

Rule (iv) requires that a speaker should entertain a stance as described in rule (iii), and that he is seriously committed to witness to it. But this rule does not require that the hearer should entertain the speaker's stance; it only requires that the hearer understand that the speaker is witnessing and that he is witnessing to God's blessings. That

is, the speaker is trying to help him to see (evoke in him) the kind of understanding he has about the world and the things therein, the understanding that they are given by Someone whom he is addressing as God in the Christian tradition.

This is what the rule requires of the nonbeliever hearer, and there is nothing in this that the hearer cannot understand. It is all straightforward empirical talk. Thus the hearer without contradicting himself can say, "I understand that the speaker is witnessing. I know he is talking a great deal about material objects and mental events. I know he is talking about them as being given by someone whom he is addressing as God in his religious tradition. I even know that he is trying to sell those ideas to me! But I believe none of them!" But what the hearer cannot say is this: "I do not understand a thing of what the speaker is saying. But I believe them all, without making sense of his belief."

If the hearer understands that the speaker is witnessing, further, if he understands what the speaker is witnessing to, we claim that the hearer has understood the utterance of the utterances such as "God has given me many blessings." The question may be raised: "Can a hearer understand the meaning of religious illocutionary acts without sharing a speaker's beliefs?" If what was said above is correct, the hearer surely can understand the meaning of the religious illocutionary act without sharing a speaker's beliefs.

I conclude that the analysis of religious meaning in terms of speech-act can satisfy the principle of empiricism in the sense that religious

meaning can be explained in terms of, or is applicable to, the ordinary use of language inoour everyday life. If the problem of religious meaning has here found its partial answer, I would like to turn to the next problem, concerning religious truth claims, that is, "In what sense is a believer's truth claim true?"

Chapter 4

RELIGIOUS TRUTH CLAIMS

The conclusion of Chapter 3 was that in order for a hearer to claim to have *fully* understood an illocutionary act performed (for example, a request to close the door), it is not enough for the hearer to know that a request is made of him, but he must also know that a request is made of him *to close the door*. The same thing is applied to religious illocutionary acts; that is, in order for a hearer to claim to have *fully* understood the meaning of a religious illocutionary act performed (for example, a prayer), the hearer must know that the speaker is praying and that he is praying *to God*.

The difficulty we face, however, is that in an ordinary illocutionary act of requesting someone to close the door, what is being referred to in the request, namely, "the door," as the critics contend, does not create the kind of philosophical problem for understanding as does the word "God," who is addressed in a religious illocutionary act of prayer. The critics suggest that this is because the reality of God cannot be taken to mean the reality of a physical object; but they insist that if talk about God were intelligible, the reality of God should be taken to mean a reality equivalent to the reality of a physical object. That is, such talk must be empirically grounded; it must have some empirical meaning. Our conten-

tion will be that the reality of God *can* be taken to mean something akin to the reality of a physical object; that talk about God *is* empirically grounded and that it has empirical meaning. The question is then, "Can religious truth claims be true? In what sense do religious utterances ever have empirical anchorage in the real world?" These are some of the questions to which I want to address the discussion of religious truth claims in this chapter.

The basic concern in dealing with the problem of religious truth claims is not, as it has been supposed in traditional philosophy of religion, to offer a "proof." The concern is not with "a chase after a ghost, never to be caught, for there is nothing to catch," as one critic remarks.[196] But the real concern is to address the issue of whether a religious truth claim is an intelligible truth claim at all. Now to offer a proof is to address the question "Can you prove it?" which presupposes that the issue under investigation is understood by the parties; but in the case of religious truth claims, rightly or wrongly, the critics' complaint is that they do not understand it and, in fact, that no one does.[197] Therefore, the primary concern for the philosophy of religion is not to offer a proof but to respond to a logically prior question: "What do we mean by 'religious truth'?" What sort of criteria can we pro-

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[196]Paul F. Schmidt, *Religious Knowledge* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1961), p. 48.

[197]Cf. Kai Nielsen, "Can Faith Validate God-Talk?" in *Theology Today* 20, 1963, pp. 160-61.

vide which will meet the demand of empiricism for the intelligibility of religious truth claims?

The Criteria for Intelligibility

In attempting to provide a criterion for the intelligibility of religious truth claims, I want to suggest that the critics' definition of criterion for intelligibility is too restricted. Basing themselves upon a too narrow interpretation of such remarks made by Wittgenstein as "To understand a proposition is to know what is the case if it is true,"[198] and accepting a general definition of truth as "All statements which are true are the statements of facts," the critics restrict the conditions for intelligibility to "knowing what to look for on the supposition that it is true." "Knowing what to look for" is itself a matter of being able to interpret the statement as referring at least to some possible experience,[199] and referring at least to some possible experience is further restricted to some "empirical experiences" involving only the senses.

Thus the "being able to interpret a statement as referring at least to some possible experience" is further taken to mean that there should be experiential differences. One would experience these when, for example, "God governs the world" and when he *stops* governing the world.

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[198] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 1957), 4.024.

[199] A. J. Ayer and F. C. Coppleston, *Logical Positivism--A Debate.* Third Program of the British Broadcasting Corporation on June 13, 1949. Reprinted in Paul Edwards and Arthur Pap, eds., *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Free Press, 1965), pp. 726-56. Quotation is taken from this reprint, p. 754.

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> If "God governs the world" did have such significance (empirical significance, or factual content), it would have to have a different empirical content than does "It is not the case that God governs the world" or "God does not govern the world."[200]

But no one can have such a differential experience since God does not, according to believers, cease to rule the world. Therefore, a religious utterance such as "God governs the world" can have no empirical anchorage, that is, it is not an intelligible truth claim, since the condition for intelligible talk is missing. Such an utterance is *intended* to be a truth claim, but it is not a real truth claim.

It is highly dubious whether knowing "all statements of fact" can mean knowing what and where to look even on the supposition that they are true except in those cases where what is referred to corresponds to the objects which are identifiable, or checkable, in some nonlinguistic way. But this will mean an undue restriction on the notion of truth. Thus if we remove some of the restrictions and widen the concept of what is the case, that is, if we try not so to identify it with no other than the strict empirical state of affairs, events, items, objects, etc., then we may redefine the necessary conditions for what is said to be true or false in this way: that what is said is true means that this is the way things are. Or in White's words: "That what is said is that this is how things are is a necessary condition for its being true or false."[201] Or simply, what is said is true means that a thing is as one says it is.[202]

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[200]Nielsen, *Contemporary Critiques of Religion*, p. 63.

[201]Alan R. White, *Truth*. New York: Doubleday, 1970, p. 28.

[202]Cf. P. F. Strawson, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*. London: Methuen, 1974, pp. 170-89.

Now, if what is said is true means "that this is how things are," then I will take it to mean that a believer will be speaking truly or that he will be saying what is true if the thing *is* as he says it is. Thus a believer will be speaking truly or saying what is true, for example, when he says "God loves me," or "God has given me many blessings," if that is the way things are. But how do we know that that is the way things are? Is there anything that will help us to understand what a believer is claiming? It appears to me that there are certain *clues* which may help us to understand what a believer is trying to claim.

Clues to Intelligibility of Religious Truth Claims

Try it and see for yourself

One of the clues, it appears to me, is pointed to by Price's recommendation to try it and see for oneself. "It is open to anyone to try it and see for himself whether it [his experience] does produce the effects it is alleged to produce. 'Try it and see for yourself' is one way of formulating the empiricist principle."[203]

Behind this recommendation lies the conviction Price has reached after having examined the nature of religious beliefs. He says:

> I have suggested that the Theistic world-outlook lays itself open at one crucial point to an empirical test. This is because an assertion about human nature is an essential part of it. The assertion is that every human being has spiritual capacities, latent in most persons and partially developed in some; and moreover that when and if these capacities are developed, or freed from the inhibitions which keep them in latent state, experiences will be forthcoming which will support

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[203] H. H. Price, *Belief*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, p. 488.

> the basic theistic propositions themselves, the propositions concerning the being and attributes of God and God's relations to us upon which the Theistic way of "viewing the world" depends. This assertion about human nature and its latent spiritual capacities can be empirically tested.[204]

The recognition that every human being has "spiritual capacity" is also affirmed by other philosophers, like Bradley who says,

> All of us, I presume, more or less, are led beyond the region of ordinary facts. Some in one way and some in others, we seem to touch and have communion with what is beyond the visible world. In various manners we find something higher, which supports and humbles, both chastens and transports us. And, with certain persons, the intellectual effort to understand the universe is a principal way of experiencing the deity.[205]

Of course, if we try to analyze what is meant by the claim that each man has spiritual capacity and that not only the mystics and believers but every man is capable of experiencing something of the world in terms of its "religious significance," we encounter difficulties. Thus raising the problem of the concept of spirituality Patrick Sherry defines spirituality in these words: "By 'spirituality' I understand a way of life in which people attempt to acquire holiness and an awareness of the presence of God through prayer, meditation and other spiritual practices."[206]

Whether or not this is a good way of understanding spirituality I do not wish to say. However, the point of interest for our concern is that

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[204]Price, *Belief*, pp. 487-88.

[205]F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*. London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1902, pp. 5-6.

[206]Patrick Sherry, *Religion, Truth and Language-Game*. London; Macmillan, 1977, p. 110.

Price's recommendation is atuned with what a religious man would like to claim; that he can get something to support his truth claims if he approaches the matter in a religiously appropriate way. Price suggests that approaching religion in an appropriate way may involve cultivating certain spiritual and moral qualities. Price mentions various devotional practices such as prayers, meditations, entertaining certain stories contained in the scriptures and the like.[207]

Religious experience as clue

Whether rightly or wrongly, believers have always wanted to say that their truth claims are *grounded* in their experience. Whether or not their claim can be justified we will examine soon. But before we do that, we must first examine what we mean by "religious experience."

As Flew points out, a believer wants to use the expression "religious experience" with a wide range of meaning. As he says:

> The expression religious experience is enormously comprehensive. Experience can embrace almost everything, which is, in a wide sense, psychological: visions of all kinds, dreaming and waking; all the analogues of visions connected with the other senses; emotions, affections, sensations, dispositions; even convictions and beliefs.[208]

According to Whiteley, religious experience in its wider sense covers:

> all those expressions men have when they are concerning themselves with a divine being--worshiping him, praying to him, meditating upon him, or endeavouring to please him. In particular, it would include all feelings and attitudes of rev-

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[207] Price, *Belief*, pp. 474ff, 483-85.

[208] A. Flew, *God and Philosophy*. London: Hutchinson, 1966, p. 125.

> erence, fear, trust, love, etc., directed toward God, or one of many gods.[209]

However, "experiences which are properly religious are distinctive and specific" says Lewis,[210] and the religious experience in its wide sense appears to lack this qualitative attribute. Therefore, Whiteley thinks that a truly religious experience will have the following features: firstly, speaking of religious persons, he says, "they seem to have experiences of being laid hold of, gripped, drawn, enveloped, even possessed by a power of a kind outside the range of the subject's ordinary experience." Secondly, "these experiences are experiences of conviction, in which it seems to the subject that some truth is revealed to him." Thirdly, whatever emotions are present in religious experience (wonder, joy, thankfulness, despair) are felt, not necessarily violently, but deeply and intensely. Religious experience is absorbing and cannot be taken lightly. Fourthly, "religious experience is influential." It has an effect, often very great effect, on the subsequent thoughts, feelings, attitudes and actions of the subjects."[211] Thus religious experiences in this restricted sense are very rare: they may occur only once in a person's lifetime, according to Whiteley.

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[209] H. D. Lewis and C. H. Whiteley, "The Cognitive Factor in Religious Experience. A Symposium" in *Proceedings Aristotelian Society*. Supplementary Vol. 21, 1955. Reprinted in R. D. Santoni, ed., *Religious Language and the Problem of Religious Knowledge*. Indiana University Press, 1968, pp. 248-65. Quotations are taken from this reprint, p. 258.

[210] Ibid.

[211] Ibid., pp. 258-59.

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Some other writers like T. R. Miles want to look at religious experience in terms of ordinary experiences which have religious significance, and will express a tendency to attach no special religious value to any dramatic or mystical experience,

> As far as unusual experiences are concerned--visions, ecstasies and the like--I am prepared to listen sympathetically to accounts of them but I have no inclination to regard them as more important than the experiences of the ordinary person who tries to live a religious life, and I would strongly contest the view that a full religious life is impossible for those who do not have ecstatic or mystical experiences. To me there is so much to wonder at in the familiar things of life...that I find no need to look elsewhere for things of interest... My interest ...lies in the personal religious experience of individuals and in the way in which particular expressions of religious conviction have struck home to people or failed to do so; and, so far as I am concerned, the fumbling of my neighbor at a Meeting for worship will almost certainly be of more religious significance than the *recherche* utterance of someone in a trance.[212]

However, whichever way we want to look at religious experience, it would appear that it covers a very wide range of both inner and outer experiences; and a truly religious experience will have those features described by Whitely, particularly the quality of its being highly influential, that it can change a man's total life. Religious experience, if it occurs, is in this way grounded in the empirical world of human experience.

Now there are three basic objections to taking religious experience as the valid clue for the intelligibility of religious truth claims. These objections are directed not so much toward whether or not a subject has had the alleged religious experience he claims he had. Some critics like Flew admit:

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[212] M, R, Miles, *Religious Experience*. London: Macmillan, 1974, p. 4.

> that there is no need in general to dispute the claims to have enjoyed vivid experiences, the experiences which make it hard for the subject to doubt that he has been in contact with some corresponding object.[213]

and that there is such a thing as religious experience--that people do have religious experiences and that these are phenomenologically different from other experiences is strongly supported by a critical study of such works as James' *Varieties of Religious Experience*[214] and Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*.[215]

The objects are instead directed primarily towards the nature of religious experience itself. These objections are: (a) that religious experience is private, that is, that it is not open to a public test; (b) that there is always a possibility that a man's religious experience can never be free from his interpretation or misinterpretation. These objections are valid to a point. But they cannot be sustained, as our analysis will suggest.

a. Religious Experience is Private

The objection that religious experience is private and psychological, so it cannot be seriously considered as a valid clue for the intelligibility of religious truth claims may be stated thus: "The object of religious experience is God," says Lewis;[216] and it is through his alleged ex-

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[213] Flew, *God and Philosophy*, p. 126.

[214] William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, Longman, 1947.

[215] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, Translated by J. W. Harvey, New York: Oxford University Press, 1925.

[216] Lewis and Whitely, *Symposium*, p. 250.

perience of God that a theist claims to have come to know the truth of what he feels about God; the reality of God, though it is given in religious experience, yet is not confined to it; the reality of God is behind, in addition to, responsible for, religious experience. Thus religious experience is concerned with that which is objectively real, and a religious truth claim is the claim to know that reality, and religious experience provides the clue for such a knowledge claim. However, it is argued, since religious experience is private and psychological, we can neither depend on the validity of inference from experience to its conclusion, nor can we rely on the words of the subject. We cannot depend on inference, since to claim that a subject has a direct experience of God is to assume that the subject has a valid reason to believe that there is a God --if this is more than a psychological claim, it is argued that this claim is wrong; as Martin says: "that the only thing that I can establish beyond possible correction on the basis of having certain feelings and experiences is that I have these feelings and sensations."[217] In other words, the crux of the argument is that no existential proposition will logically follow from a private and psychological experience. It is also argued that we cannot take religious experience as a valid clue for intelligibility, partly because the object of religious experience is not open to a public checking. For example, if I claim to have seen a tiger in the woods my claim is open to a public checking, that is, that there can be

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[217] C. B. Martin, *Religious Belief*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1959, p. 67.

some footmarks of a tiger which people can see. But in the case of a religious truth claim no such visible marks or clues are available. As Hepburn says:

> There is no detecting his presence by bumps on the stair or even a whispered word or the glimpse of a face. We cannot, with him, point or glance in this or that direction and say, "There, he is coming now." We have only that felt sense of personal meeting, a sense of addressing and being addressed. He leaves no marks of his presence such that we might say--"This proves he is with us." There is nothing for the camera or the tape-recorder.[218]

Of course, it would be nonsense if the critics would expect that the reality of God be verifiable in a strict sense like the reality of a physical object, like a chair or a table, or by traces similar to those left by a burglar who drops his cigarette butts, or leaves the footmarks of his shoes, etc. Such an attack will simply prove that the critics not only have grossly misunderstood the nature of religious truth claims, but it will also suffer a serious repercussion on the general theory of truth, because it will mean an undue restriction on the concept of truth. Nay, the attack is directed primarily towards a certain understanding of "private experience." The expression "private experience" includes not only the secret thoughts, or the private codes which are known only to the person who has them and to nobody else; it also includes such experiences as "having pain," "feeling angry" and the like. Such experiences are considered private because it is the person who has such experiences who has them and no one else can have them in exactly the same way. That is, if

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[218] R. W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox* (London: Watts, 1958), p. 25.

I have a toothache, it is I who have it and no one else can have it. Thus by logical necessity no other person can have the toothache which I am having now; someone else may have a toothache, but it is his toothache. We may both have toothaches, but his toothache is his and my toothache is mine; we still could not, logically, have another man's experience of having a toothache. It is in this strict logical sense that the expression "private experience" is defined.

The question is then asked: "how do we know that other people have such experiences?" Given that the above definition of private experience be accepted, we must admit that it is not possible to know that other people have such experiences as having pain. This is because the conditions required for a knowledge claim are logically impossible to fulfill. That is, in order for me to know that John is having pain, I would have to experience his having pain by a direct apprehension; but to have a direct apprehension in a required sense is a logical impossibility; since in order for me to know that John has a pain I should have to have John's having a pain, which as we saw above is logically impossible.

The problem discussed above is the problem of our knowledge of other people's minds; thus arguing along this line Hepburn, for example, denies that we can ever know that other people have a direct experience (encounter) with God.[219] If we accept a definition of a private experience as explained above we must admit that we cannot know that other people have an experience of God. However, we should also note that even in the philos-

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[219]Cf. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox*, chaps. 3-4.

ophy of mind, the skeptical argument of solipsism has been rejected by many as being unacceptable or even unintelligible. Thus, for example, V. C. Chappell writes:

> It begins from obvious truths and contains no obvious mistakes of fact or logic. But its conclusion is nonetheless unacceptable. Solipsism is false; it may be necessarily false, even unintelligible.[220]

Philosophers who reject the argument for solipsism often make a strong appeal to a common sense conviction that we do know. We do know, they argue, when we see a person who is angry, that he is angry. Maintaining a similar philosophical position, Attfield argues:

> It is normally taken as a mark of sanity to possess unshakable common-sense conviction--that we know. A similar claim in regard to religion may not be unreasonable. In spiritual spheres a huge dimension of awareness of God seems to be available comparable to that men have through their senses.[221]

In our approach to the problem we acknowledge the difficulties of inferring an existential proposition either by inductive or deductive methods. Thus we acknowledge that there are difficulties of deriving the existence of "other minds" or of "material objects" either by arguing from bodily behaviors or mental events, or by arguing from sense experiences. We recognize that we face the same kind of difficulties if we try to "prove" religious truth by arguing from religious experience which some individuals may have. Thus acknowledging the difficulties we do not speak

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[220] V. C. Chappell, ed., *The Philosophy of Mind* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 6.

[221] D. G. Attfield, "The Argument from Religious Experience," in *Religious Studies* 11, 1975, p. 338.

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of offering a "proof." If what we have said is correct and is an attempt to answer a logically second order question, then we speak of the "clues" of whether certain alleged facts if available can satisfy the conditions which empiricism demands.

We have noted that the conditions for intelligible talk indicate that what is said should be grounded in human experience; we are arguing, if that is the case and if what the believer says is true, that is, if he has had the religious experience he claims he had, then he may have something to offer which will satisfy the conditions which empiricism demands. However, the objection has been raised, "How do we know that he has had a religious experience such as what he claims he had?" This objection is raised on the basis of a certain stipulated definition of "private experience" which, as we say, though logically consistent, we know is false.

There is another way to respond to the objection. It makes very little sense to talk about "experiencing an experience"; in other words, an experience implies experiencing *something* which is other than the experience itself.[222] Thus to experience means to experience something. This being the case, it is never purely subjective and private. But my concern is not with the analysis of whether an experience necessarily implies experiencing something, and whether this "something" can also be the "Someone" of religious experience. My concern is with "religious" experience. We have said that religious experience among other things is highly influential. It can change a person's life; it affects his

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[222]Cf. Keith E. Yandell, "Religious Experience and Rational Appraisal" in *Religious Studies* 10, 1974, pp. 175ff.

thoughts and plans of action. However, it will be a mistake if it is understood that the change we see in a person's life in *itself* proves the reality of his experience claim. This is not my meaning. What I am suggesting is that when a person claims that he has experience of God, and when we see the change in his life, it suggests that we cannot ignore it; the fact that he has changed, though this does not necessarily prove the reality of his experience, strongly suggests the credibility of his claim.

Let us suppose that John claims that he has experienced God at 8 P.M. on May 30, 1978, while sitting under a tree. In a sense his experience will not be open to a public test; and in this sense his experience is private. Now in an ordinary religious situation what would count to justify his experience claim? I suppose, if the following conditions were fulfilled, then we could ordinarily say that John is telling us the truth.

Let us stipulate that John is not a "religious" person in an ordinary sense. Then from 8 P.M. on May 30, 1978, as he claims, others begin to notice the change slowly coming into his life. Among other things, people now begin to see in him some positive Christian qualities operating in his life. In such a situation, it seems that we will be justified in believing John's word. Of course, as stressed before, it will not in itself prove the reality of his experience. But when we see the changes in John's life they do give us grounds to accept the truth of his experience.

Thus religious experience may in some sense be private and psychological but the effects that we see in the person are not; they are pub-

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lic, and believers will appeal to them as clues to understanding his religious claims.

b. Religious experience can be delusive rather than veridical

The second objection for taking religious experience as the valid clue for the intelligibility of talk about religious truth claims is that religious experience can be delusive rather than veridical. The argument in its simplest form is this: since it is possible for someone who believes that he has experienced God to be mistaken in that belief, it is false to claim that there could be self-authenticating religious experience. Rather, any putative experience of God may be delusive rather than veridical.[223] Or as Oakes summarizes the argument:

> Corroborative tests are always logically (if not psychologically) relevant to an adjudication of the truth of experimental claims with extra-psychological entailments (i.e., those which go beyond "I seem to see-- etc.). Consequently, in so far as claims to have experience of God entail something more far-reaching than simply a psychological fact about the claimant, i.e., God's existence, corroborative tests are always logically relevant to the truth of such claims. However, since it would be false to suppose that such tests could have any epistemic relevance to a self-authenticating experience, it is thereby false to suppose that there could be any such thing as religious experience which is self-authenticating. Rather, there is always the possibility that someone's putative experience of God is delusive rather than veridical. Consequently, since it is clearly possible for someone who has *not* experienced God to believe that he has, i.e., to be mistaken in the belief that he has experienced God, there can clearly be no such thing as incorrigible religious experience.[224]

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[223] C. F. Martin, *Religious Belief*, chap. 5.

[224] R. A. Oakes, "Religious Experience and Rational Certainty" in *Religious Studies* 12, 1976, pp. 311-12.

By "self-authentication" it is usually meant that a person who has an experience of God cannot be mistaken. It is not, however, clear to me what is meant by "delusion." Sometimes the term is used as a synonym of "daydream," "nightmare," "imagination," even "hallucination"; sometimes "delusion" is used not as an odd psychological occurrence, but in an ordinary sense: that which is delusive means that which can be mistaken. Thus someone's experience of God is delusive means that someone's experience of God can be mistaken. Commenting on the issue Donovan has this to say:

> So long as people can have daydreams or nightmares, or suffer from various delusions (and all these things are common enough) then it will always be open to an impartial observer to consider someone's so-called religious experience as simply an odd psychological occurrence. If it happens to loom large in the thinking and life of the person who experiences it, that is because he reads into it some religious significance. There will be no way of showing, by appealing simply to a subjective experience itself.[225]

Or as Hobbes bluntly puts it:

> For if a man pretend to me, that God hath spoken to him supernaturally, and immediately, and I make doubt of it, I cannot easily perceive what argument he can produce, to oblige me to beleeve it.... To say he hath spoken to him in a Dream, is no more then to say he dreamed that God spake to him;[226]

It appears to me that such comments and criticisms are fair enough to a point. Undoubtedly, all sensory experiences including religious experience can be delusive; no one will deny it. It is our common experience both in the mundane world and in religion that there is always this

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[225] Donovan, *Religious Language*, p. 38.

[226] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: J. M. Dent, 1914), p. 200.

possibility that a person's putative experience can be mistaken. However, there are two important points we must raise: (1) one is concerned with the concept of self-authentication of religious experience. Must the concept of self-authentication be associated with a delusive experience (as the critics do), rather than with a veridical experience? (ii) Can the critics be justified in their move from a particular religious experience which can be delusive to a general conclusion that religious experience is delusive as such? The defenders of religious experience think that the critics are wrong on both points.

The critics argue that, since the man who claims to have experience of God can be mistaken, it is false to say that his experience of God is self-authenticating--that he cannot be mistaken. Oakes argues that the critics' argument is muddled. He says,

> Obviously something is very much amiss here... How could so many critics believe that to refute the claim that religious experience is self-authenticating, all that needs to be shown is that someone who believes he has experienced God could be mistaken.[227]

He argues that even if we concede that the person who claims to have experienced God *is* mistaken, this in no way resembles anything that would constitute a refutation of the notion that religious experience is self-authenticating. Oakes argues that the critics made a mistake of associating the concept of self-authentication with a delusive experience.

Oakes illustrates his point in this way: suppose that his (Oakes') eyesight is less than good. And unfortunately he has just smashed his

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[227]Oakes, "Religious Experience and Rational Certainty," p. 313.

eyeglasses and it is going to take him a day to get his new eyeglasses. Now one of his colleagues paints his white coffee cup with "a deep shade of green with blue polka dots." On returning to his office, Oakes now finds a green coffee cup spattered with blue polka dots. Notice, since Oakes' belief of what he is seeing now is *true*, his experience is veridical. But because his eyesight is less than good without the glasses and since he has no eyeglasses, he has reason for rational doubt about the veridicality of his veridical experience. However, while the experience in question is veridical, it is clear he cannot be certain it is. Now suppose, Oakes says, he calls his other colleagues to confirm his experience. But because of the prearranged maneuver, they insist that it is his white coffee cup he is seeing. So rather than veridical, his experience of the "green with blue polka dot cup" is delusive. Now due to the missing of his eyeglasses, and the confirmation of those who have good eyesight, Oakes has rational grounds to reject the veridicality of his veridical experience.

> Now, while this is somewhat of an atypical or extreme example, I believe it illustrates something of the significance which is true of all experience in at least non-religious contexts; that is, that there is always the possibility of evidence being developed which would constitute justification for calling into question the veridicality of any veridical experience, and that is why it is always false to suggest that "ordinary" (i.e., nonreligious) experience could ever be self-authenticating. Hence it is perfectly correct to point out that there might be any number of cases like the hypothetical coffee-cup case in which it is counted to be irrational to believe in the veridicality of veridical experience.[228]

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[228]Oakes, "Religious Experience and Rational Certainty," p. 314.

Oakes' argument makes it clear, then, that the concept of self-authentication has nothing to do with delusive experience; "what could possibly be self-authenticating about a delusive experience?" he asks. The self-authenticating religious experience according to Oakes is

> veridical experience of God which is sufficient to guarantee that the person having that veridical experience could never (in principle) have any justification for questioning its veridicality.[229]

Self-authentication is then a necessary condition for the veridicality of religious experience; thus to suggest that it is delusive constitutes an oversight of this fact. If religious experience could be delusive there is nothing which would count as eligible for self-authentication, Oakes argues.

As to whether there is such a thing as self-authenticating religious experience, Oakes' answer is "Yes."

> ...there would seem to be no obvious reason why this question should not be answered affirmatively... That is, insofar as God is essentially omnipotent, i.e., insofar as God (if he exixts) can on hypothesis bring about any logically consistent state of affairs...the onus would seem to be on the opposition to show wherein there is any conceptual difficulty involved in the notion of God ensuring that experience of (i.e., revelation from) him are such as to guarantee that there could (in principle) be no subsequent justification for any person N who has had such an experience to call its veridicality into question.[230]

If Oakes' arguments are correct (and it seems that they are very convincing), then the critics are confused about the concept of self-authentication; they are not rejecting what a believer means by "self-authenti-

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[229] Oakes, "Religious Experience and Rational Certainty," p. 314.

[230] Ibid., p. 316.

cating" religious experience but only what they consider to be the concept of self-authenticating experience; and Oakes' arguments make it convincing that there could be self-authenticating religious experience.

Then secondly, and very briefly, the critics seem to have made a mistake in drawing a general conclusion that religious experience as a whole is mistaken; that no religious experiences can be about the real world but are only the figment of their own imagination. Therefore, religious experience cannot be considered a valid clue for an intelligibility claim.

Now it is a common experience in our mundane world that a particular experience associated with the senses can, sometimes, be mistaken. It demands no argument or illustration to prove it. And it makes sense to deny that a particular religious experience be veridical; but it is something else to claim that religious experience as a whole is mistaken. If religious experience as a whole be mistaken, I find it hard to understand what sort of mistake it could even be.

If in our everyday experience we know that a particular experience is delusive or mistaken it is because we have had a veridical experience. It is in relation to our veridical experience that we know a delusive or a mistaken experience. But if experience as such be delusive, what sense does it make? Likewise, it makes sense to claim that a particular religious experience be delusive rather than veridical; but it hardly makes sense to claim that religious experience as a whole is delusive, that it gives no clue at all to any intelligibility claim about talk of religious truth claims.

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c. An experience is never free from interpretation

The third and final objection for taking religious experience as the clue for an intelligibility claim is that an alleged religious experience is never free from interpretation. The objection is this: that each subject who claims to have a religious experience interprets the nature of reality in accordance with the thought forms, beliefs, ideas of his particular religious tradition to which he belongs. Thus, if the person who claims to have religious experience be a Christian, the object of his experience will be interpreted in the thought forms of Christian theology and philosophy; if the person be a Hindu, the nature of the reality he has experienced will be interpreted in the conceptual scheme of Hinduism and in Indian philosophical terms. Thus it is argued an alleged religious experience is never "a bare record" of the immediate encounter as it purports to be and in trying to make sense out of it a believer might have misinterpreted it;[231] or that "no experience is ever what may be called 'neat'" but rather, it is always a combination of something immediate and something traditional or presupposed.[232] And also the nature of reality presupposed in the alleged experience seems to depend largely upon the interest, background and expectations of those who have religious experiences rather than anything separate and autonomous.[233] Thus, if we look at the

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[231]Cf. R. W. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox*, Chap. 3.

[232]A. Hall, "Religious Experience as a Court of Appeal" in *The Hibbert Journal* 53, 1955, p. 366.

[233]A. Flew, *God and Philosophy*, p. 126.

diverse and enormously varied religious experiences, each claiming authenticating innumerable beliefs, ideas, claims, we notice that many of these are not only conflicting but are in plain contradiction to one another. Basing themselves upon such considerations (which appear to be true), the critics argue that they have reasons for rational doubts of the validity of a subject's report. Thus Flew says:

> We are, therefore, not entitled, because a man truly has certain subjective experiences, immediately to infer that these are experiences of what is truly and objectively the case: nor must we assume, because such experiences are in some sense truly religious, that they must as such or consequently represent religious truths.[234]

It appears that many of the considerations the critics have given are obviously true. Undoubtedly each person who claims to have religious experience interprets the nature of reality from within the conceptual framework of his religion. This is a truism: how else could he describe the nature of reality he has experienced except in the language, thought forms and beliefs of his religion? It is obviously true that many of the interpretations of the nature of reality conflict with each other. The believers acknowledge that sometimes they misinterpret their experiences. Thus those time-honored dogmas of beliefs which the adherents considered as the voice of God or gods have often been rejected as nothing but the whims and follies of human minds. Such conflicting beliefs and claims are found not only among the inter-confessional confrontations but also with the systems of each religion. Basing their conclusions upon these occurrences, the

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[234] Flew, *God and Philosophy*, p. 127.

critics then incorrectly conclude that there can be no valid, objective religious truths. They claim that speeches about religious experience are only Mumbo-jumbo speeches; that statements about religious experience are autobiographical statements, and are statements of their own mental conditions.[235] They contend that such utterances cannot be said to be grounded in the real world. However, as Baelz says:

> What I wish now to suggest is that religious experience when carefully analysed, has its own peculiar structure, and presents itself as an experience of, and response to, a religious "object," which is other than the experiences considered autobiographically.[236]

I will suggest that we can take it for granted that, in his experience, a man is related to something other than himself. By this I do not mean that there should be some corresponding object to every experience, which will of course be false. But what I am affirming is that any attempt to make sense out of human experience must not be founded on solipsism of any kind.

Revelatory Features as Clue

We have been looking at one of the widespread contentions among the contemporary philosophers of religion who claim that if religious truth claims are not only *intended* truth claims but *real* truth claims, then such truth claims should empirically be grounded in actual human experi-

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[235] Cf. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, Chap. 6.

[236] Peter R. Baelz, *Christian Theology and Metaphysics*, London: Epworth Press, 1968, p. 100.

ence. And only when they are known to be grounded in actual human experience religious truth claims can be said to have passed the test for intelligibility. Believers then argue that religious truth claims *are* grounded in actual human experience, that is, in religious experience. Believers claim it is because religious truths are grounded in their religious experiences that they have a valid knowledge content. The critics then presented their counter-arguments attempting to show that a believer's defense is futile since the nature of the claim is such that it *cannot* be said to have empirical anchorage in actual human experience.

We have examined the critics' chief objections for taking religious truth claims as being empirically grounded in actual human experience. Our examinations, if they are valid, suggest that the critics' arguments are not as conclusive as they should be. That is, they do not convincingly show us that religious truth claims cannot be said to have empirical anchorage in human experience. Although this does not in itself give us a sufficient ground to justify our claim for intelligibility about religious truths, yet when combined with some other considerations such as the *effects* that we can see in the life of the person who claims to have a religious experience, it does seem to suggest strongly that we can take religious experience as an adequate clue for the intelligibility claim concerning religious truths.

I now want to look at whether some considerations based on alleged revelatory features can support this conclusion. Broadly speaking, in the Christian tradition, there are two principal ways of understanding the

concept of revelation. There is the Thomist account of revelation, which is primarily concerned with revelation as a proposition, what God has revealed is the body of truth. Many Protestant theologians are not willing to accept this understanding of revelation as proposition. William Temple, for example, argues that

> there is no such thing as revealed truth. There are truths of revelation, that is to say propositions which express the result of correct thinking concerning revelation; but they are not themselves directly revealed.[237]

In the Protestant tradition revelation is described by Hick as "God's acts."[238] Revelation is God's act of revealing himself to men which comes to us through the events occurring in the historical experience of mankind, particularly through the history of Israel, and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The scriptures are, of course, not infallible records of truths which God tells men about himself, but historical accounts of the revelatory events seen in the human experience. Thus in the words of MacIntosh "revelatory events" are the "empirical data" of philosophy of religion.[239]

It is usually accepted among the theologians of revelation that revelation comes to men not only through the scriptures, the history of Israel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also through such

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[237]William Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, London: Macmillan, 1934, p. 317.

[238]Cf. John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, London: Collins, 1974.

[239]Douglas C, MacIntosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science*, New York: Macmillan, 1919, p. 31.

things as the general features of the world: the regularity and order seen in nature, the thunder and lightning, and even the rising of the sun and its setting. Thus William Temple says, "Only if God is revealed in the rising of the sun in the sky can he be revealed in the rising of a son of man from the dead."[240] Or as the Psalmist in a familiar passage says:

> The heavens are telling the glory of God
> and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
> (Ps. 19:1)

Or one can recall the words of St. Paul:

> Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible nature, namely his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made (Rom. 1:20).

The medium through which God's revelation comes to men range from an ordinary thing such as the rising and setting of the sun, or a tree which is standing in the backyard, to something which is an extraordinary event that occurred in human history. As a matter of fact, almost anything can serve as a medium of God's revelation. We should also note that theologians lay great stress on the role of human discovery in the concept of revelation. God's revealing act and human discovery are the two necessary conditions for the completed view of revelation.

> Revelation and religious perception are thus correlative terms, the objective and subjective poles, respectively, of normal religious experience. They are, within the cognitive religious situation, the stimulus and the response.[241]

In other words, revelation is a two-way traffic; God's revelation and human discovery are two sides of a coin. Or as Baillie expresses it:

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[240] Temple, *Nature, Man and God*, p. 305.

[241] MacIntosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science*, p. 107.

> We must therefore say that the receiving is as necessary to a completed act of revelation as the giving. It is only as far as the action of God in history understood as God means it to be understood that revelation has a place at all. The illumination of the receiving mind is a necessary condition of the divine self-disclosure.[242]

Or as another writer expresses it:

> Revelation occurs objectively but is subjectively received and conditioned... Revelation is not something belonging purely to the subject world, such as truth or ideas immediately apprehended, but it is mediated by historical events. But revelation must be appreciated and received in order to be revelation. If no one were to apprehend a divinely guided event as such, it would not be revelatory.[243]

Now the philosophical objection for taking revelatory events as a valid clue for an intelligibility claim concerning religious truths is not the fact that there are no such revelatory phenomena. The alleged revelatory events as pointed out include not only ordinary features such as the rising of the sun and its setting; the regularity and order seen in nature--the summer and winter, the day and night, etc., but also unusual events like miracles, answered prayers, conversions and so on. For the theist, these are all revelatory phenomena and they all belong to the *public domain*. These are the empirical data of philosophy of religion; the theists take them seriously and consider them critically. The critics do not deny that such empirical data are available. Therefore, if the theist is making an unsophisticated claim, making an appeal to the stars,

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[242] John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in the Recent Thought*, London: Oxford University Press, 1956, p. 64.

[243] Owen C. Thomas, *William Temple's Philosophy of Religion*, London: SPCK, 1961, p. 97.

the sun and the moon, the bounteous harvest, the good health, the exodus, the prophetic utterances, etc., as revelatory phenomena, the critics acknowledge the fact that there are such things.

But what the critics want to challenge is the correctness of the theist's interpretation of the significance of the alleged revelatory phenomena. As Penelhum says:

> It is important, however, that the sceptic can agree that there are alleged revelations. For this means not only that there are people who have alleged that there have been revelations. It also means that there have been phenomena which believers have claimed to be revelatory ones. In other words, a sceptic who denies that x is, as a believer claims, a revelation of God need not question that x has occurred, though he may. He need only question whether the believer is interpreting its significance correctly.[244]

The critics then admit that there are alleged revelatory phenomena, but deny the correctness of the interpretation of the significance of these alleged revelatory phenomena. In other words, the critics will admit that there are such phenomena but will deny that they *are* revelatory.

It is argued, if God were to reveal himself to men through the various media aforementioned, then there would be some identifiable marks of God's revelation seen in these alleged revelatory phenomena. As Nielsen, for example, says: "Ordinarily, if a term has an objective referent it is, at least in principle, possible to identify its referent."[245] Thus, if God were to have revealed himself through the various empirical data, then

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[244]Terence Penelhum, *The Problem of Religious Knowledge*, p. 91.

[245]Nielsen, *Scepticism*, London: Macmillan, 1973, p. 51.

there would be some kind of identifiable marks--there may be something comparable to a publisher's "house-style" or a company's "seal"; but there are no such empirically identifiable marks of God's revelation comparable to a publisher's "house-style" or a company's "seal." Thus if a theist claims that God has revealed to him (spoken to him) through the whisper of the wind, the critics want to know whether the theist is hearing another objectively identifiable voice coming through the noise made by the wind like the overlapping radio station. But since the theist can hear nothing besides the noise made by the wind, the critics then argue that the theist has made a mistake in interpreting the significance of the alleged revelatory phenomenon.

It appears that if revelation, in order to meet the demand of empiricism is to be understood in a physical or material sense, then a theist must admit that revelation cannot meet the demand of empiricism. However, a theist will rightly insist that God is not a physical object--that which can be detected in a scientific instrument, or photographed, or his voice be recorded. If these are the sort of things a critic is demanding, a theist will rightly defend himself by claiming that a critic has grossly misunderstood the logic of his language. He has totally missed the significance of his truth claims. For the kind of things that would satisfy the critics' criteria for intelligibility could not be produced. But even if they could be produced, as McPherson rightly points out, "indeed, the *idea* of this kind of evidence would make no sense."[246]

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[246]Thomas McPherson, "The Falsification Challenge: a Comment," in *Religious Studies* 5, 1969, p. 82.

But the crux of the problem seens to lie even deeper than this: the alleged revelatory phenomena seen in the general features of the world, or in the historical events of human experience to which a theist wants to make an appeal as clues for his knowledge claim, are open to both theistic and montheistic intepretations. That is, from a critic's viewpoint, if a theist is making "God" as part of his general explanation of the features of the world, the critic wants to claim that the notion of "God" is superfluous. As Ayer argues, if "Jehovah is angry" is part of (or the whole of) the meaning of "It is thundering," then all that one needs is "It is thundering." Thus, the trees, flowers, mountains, rivers, stars, the changing of one's religion to another, the escape from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, etc., are all that are needed to be said concerning the furniture of the universe.[247] But a theist is not convinced; he wants to challenge contention; he wants to claim that this is not the whole story.

Let us suppose that a primitive tribal person believes that God is responsible for a bounteous harvest. He is now given a nontheistic explanation; he is shown that it is because he has chosen the piece of land which has not been cultivated in the past ten years; that there has been plenty of rain and plenty of sunshine; that there are no destructive insects during the rice-flower season and that there have been few wild pigs that year and so on. A tribal man admits all that, but he maintains (and without contradicting himself) that God is responsible for the bounteous

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[247] Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, p. 116.

harvest. This is because a belief that God is responsible for the fruitful harvest is compatible with the naturalistic explanation.

Or consider again a person who believes that God is responsible for the person's good health. He may how be given a naturalistic explanation: that he is very fortunate to have a good doctor who can prescribe for him the correct drugs and proper diet. A man admits all that, but he maintains that God is responsible for his good health; God cures a man working through the doctor and the nurse.

Examples like this are numerous. But the nature of the attack and the nature of the defense will follow a similar line. Whatever the event, or occurrences, or phenomena, a theist will point them out as the revelatory clue to his knowledge claim. A critic will bring forth a scientific explanation attempting to invalidate his claim, dismissing it as either inconclusive or irrelevant. However, the examples of the kind we have considered show that the nontheistic explanation does not discredit conclusively a theistic interpretation. A theistic interpretation remains an open, alternative, explanation,

We may now ask this question: why has a nontheistic explanation of the purported revelatory events, occurrences, phenomena attracted so many intellectuals, as if other possible interpretations did not exist? Partly because, if we look at the brute facts that constitute the event, occurrences, etc., apart from those facts that have been enumerated by the naturalistic explanation, nothing else is available. Thus many people appeared to have been misled into thinking that a nonthesistic explanation

explains all; the whole story about the furniture of the world has been told. But the nature of our investigation suggests that this is not quite so. And it may even be good to remind ourselves, when we hear beautiful music, we obviously hear only the *sound*--and perhaps, for someone who is not musically attuned, this is all he hears. But from this he should resist the temptation to draw a conclusion that all talk about music is incoherent, unintelligible, etc., for if he falls prey to this temptation he will not only be unreasonable, but at least in one sense mistaken.

Similarly, I will suggest that what we have described as the empirical data of philosophy of religion, when seen from one angle, are nothing but the hard facts that constitute the furniture of the world; but from another angle, they are God's revelation to us; and not to understand them in this way would in one sense be like refusing to admit music (i.e., dismissing it on the grounds that he hears only the sound or noise!).

In our analysis we maintain that revelation is a two-way process. It is both human discovery and God's act of making himself known to us through various media. Therefore, since the natural phenomena, features of the world, events, which are grounded in human experience, are the data of revelation, they affect our thoughts, create imagination in us; they arrest our vision and uplift our minds; they strike us with awe, wonder and delight; They speak to us. As one recent writer says:

> They surround us and call to us as pepple call: to disregard them is not merely to miss something but to behave unrealistically, to pretend that the powers do not exist when they are

onlyttoo real. All this is not too remote from belief in a personal God.[248]

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[248]John Wilson, *Philosophy and Religion*, London: Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 95.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we may highlight a few of the important points of our argument. The claim of this thesis has been that a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act, that the central theistic claims have literal meaning, that they are cognitively meaningful,

Having made this claim we note that *the* problem of religious language according to contemporary philosophers of religion is not that religious language has *any* meaning, but whether it is cognitively meaningful. Having stated the problem of religious language I then examined various well-known theories of religious language--the noncognitivist, cognitivist, the challenge to the challenge, and the language-game theory. The noncognitivist theory of religious language partially agrees with the critics that religious affirmations are not assertions in any ordinary sense, but disagreed with them that they are nonsensical. The primary difficulty I have with this theory is that, apart from the fact that this theory has no real case to argue with the critics, it leaves no room for a significant religious truth claim. It does not allow a believer even to say what he wants to say, that his language has an anchorage in the real world. The cognitivist theory of religious language makes it very clear that religious utterances are assertions, etc., and they are cognitively

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meaningful. But the proponents of this theory to my understanding fail to establish the fact that religious utterances *are* assertions, that they *are* cognitively meaningful. Part of the difficulties of this theory has been that the proponents are still working within the framework of a positivist theory of meaning tacitly accepting its criteria for knowledge. Of those who want to challenge the challenge I do not have much to say. Philosophers like Mavrodes claim that the challenge itself is conceptually muddled; therefore they ask us not to take the challenge seriously until the critics can put forward their challenge in more coherent terms. But muddled or not, the challenge reflects a deep and genuine disquiet about the status of religious language and as such we cannot ignore it.

The language-game theory of religious language thinks that the critics have misunderstood the logic of religious language and the problem is misconstrued. The problem according to this theory is created by the imposition of the criteria brought from outside of religious discourse. That there are many meaningful uses of language the theory argues, and religious use of language is one of such meaningful uses. Thus religious language is in order as it is. The language-game theory has limited but significant value. The recognition that we should pay closer attention to a believer's actual use of his language in order to know his meaning is in itself a significant contribution despite the fact that the theory has failed fully to make use of it. But the theory has its fundamental weaknesses: for no language-game is totally insulated, completely immune to outside criticism as the theory wants us to believe. Moreover the

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language-game theory is open to a noncognitivist interpretation which we have found to be unsatisfactory.

Having thus failed to be satisfied with the various accounts of religious language, I then put forward a speech-act theory of religious language. I claim that in the Austinian conception of "illocutionary act" the demand of this thesis can be met. Thus working out a theory of meaning from the standpoint of a hearer's understanding of what is said to him, I claim that in an ordinary situation if the hearer understands what the speaker is speaking of, then in that situation the hearer has understood the meaning of what is said to him. Thus a request to "close the door" for example, if the hearer understands that a request is made of him to close the door, I claim that the hearer has understood the meaning of a request "Close the door."

Since the critics like Nielsen admit that such uses of language are cognitively meaningful they must also grant that such uses of language are grounded in the domain of everyday world of everyday life. And since this is granted I made a further claim that the critics must also grant that religious utterances are literal, that they are cognitively meaningful. That is, that religious utterances must in some important sense be grounded in the real world. In other words, that a religious illocutionary act functions in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act.

But in order fully to justify the claim that a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act, we should be able to define the sense in which basic theis-

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tic affirmations are grounded in the real world. But this creates a serious problem. In an ordinary illocutionary act of requesting someone to close the door, for example, what is referred to in the request, namely the door, does not create the kind of philosophical problem as does the word God in a religious illocutionary act of prayer. This is because the reality of God cannot straightforwardly be taken as the reality of a physical object. This is the problem to which I have responded through the discussion of religious truth claims.

The problem of religious truth claims is not to offer a proof but to address a logically prior question of whether a religious truth claim is an intelligible truth claim. But attempting to provide the criteria for the intelligible truth claim meets with another difficulty. This is because the criteria or the conditions set by the principle of empiricism as understood by the critics are hard to satisfy. However, I made a suggestion, if we relax some of the conditions, that is, if we widen the concept of something being "grounded in the real world" and try not to identify it with strict empirical facts, events, state of affairs that can be pointed at, shown, identified with, etc., I made a claim that there are certain things such as religious experience, revelatory phenomena, which can serve us as *clues* of whether religious claims are in fact grounded in the actual human experience and thereby to say whether they have anchorage in the real world.

There are, however, serious difficulties in taking religious experiences as the valid clue for the intelligibility claim. The objections

are raised primarily not against the fact that people might not have the alleged experiences they had, but against the fact that such alleged experiences can be private, that they are not open to a public test, or that they can be delusive rather than veridical, or that they can never be free from a subject's interpretation. I argue that a critic's definition of something being private, etc., is based upon the misunderstanding of something being private, etc., and that he has failed to show conclusively that an alleged religious experience cannot be grounded in the actual human experience. Of course, such an argument cannot in itself meet the conditions set by the principle of empiricism, but when conjoined with some other considerations, such as a change that we can see in the lives of those who claim to have an experience of God, such a change can serve us as a strong clue for the intelligibility claim.

This conclusion is reinforced by the consideration of the fact of revelation. Revelation I take to mean God's act of revealing himself. Many theologians acknowledge the fact that any event or feature of the world can serve as a medium of revelation. The primary objection for taking revelatory events, certain features of the world, as clues for the intelligibility claim is not whether such alleged revelatory events can be seen in the world. The objection is whether a believer has correctly interpreted such alleged revelatory phenomena. This objection is raised for the reason that the same purported revelation is open to both the theistic and nontheistic interpretations. But the critics are not satisfied with that. They want to claim that the nontheistic interpre-

tation can invalidate theistic interpretation. I agree that an alleged revelation is open to both theistic and nontheistic interpretations, but disagree that a nontheistic interpretation can invalidate theistic interpretation. And I argue, since the critics accept certain events as revelatory, such events can serve as clues for the intelligibility claim.

Now if these arguments are valid, then we may have succeeded in establishing the fact that a religious illocutionary act functions logically in the same way as does an ordinary illocutionary act. In other words, we may have succeeded in establishing the fact that the central theistic affirmations are both meaningful and true.

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